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# NMA

NEW MUSIC ARTICLES

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The logic of seduction ■ Spaced Out Sydney ■ Drumming in the age of electronic reproduction ■  
■ Music in the service of domination ■ A small mythology of disco ■ Lookin' for the Beat ■  
Dancing out the depression ■ Dance mania: Chaos or Control



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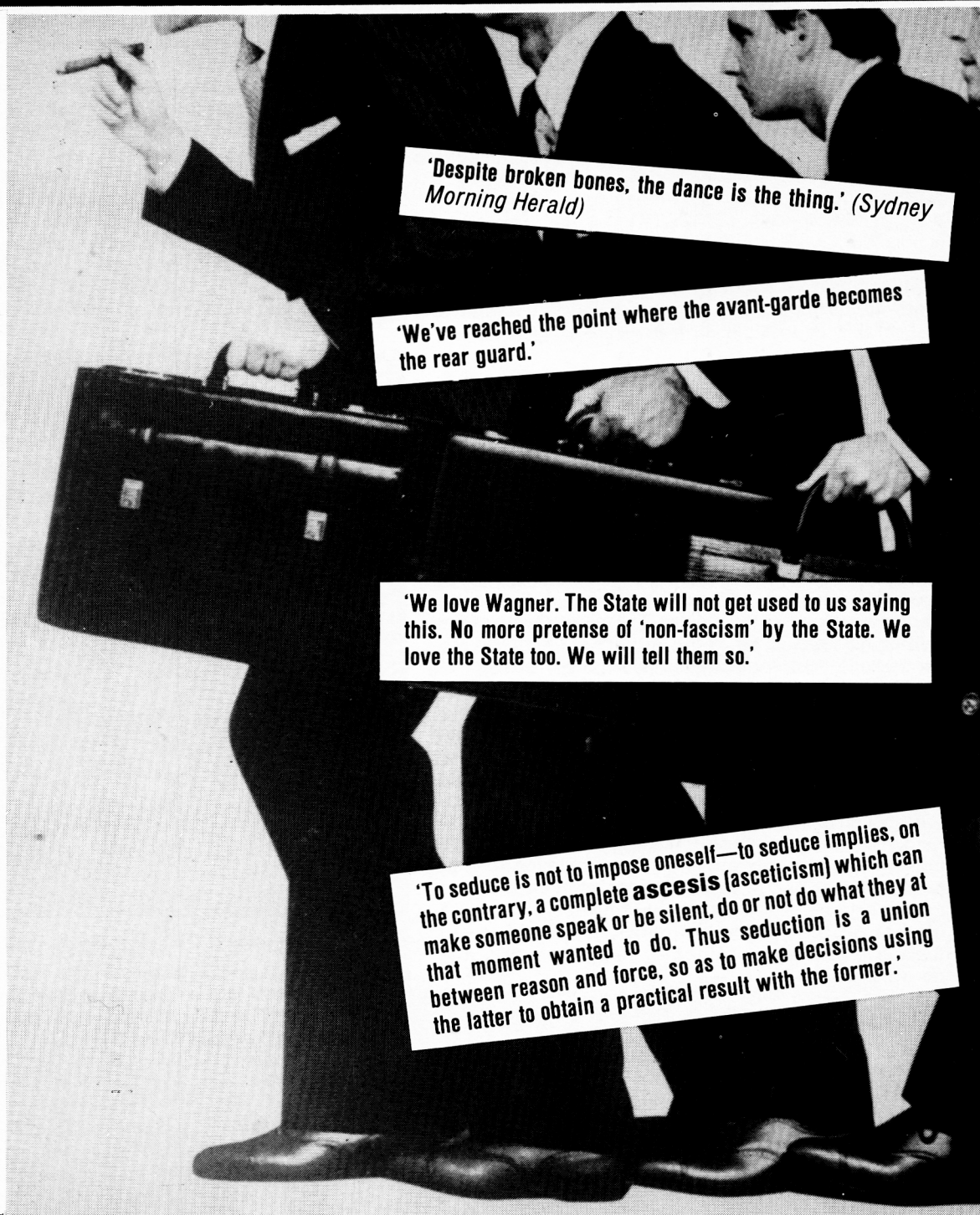
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NEW MUSIC ARTICLES

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# EDITORIAL



'Despite broken bones, the dance is the thing.' (Sydney Morning Herald)

'We've reached the point where the avant-garde becomes the rear guard.'

'We love Wagner. The State will not get used to us saying this. No more pretense of 'non-fascism' by the State. We love the State too. We will tell them so.'

'To seduce is not to impose oneself—to seduce implies, on the contrary, a complete **ascesis** (asceticism) which can make someone speak or be silent, do or not do what they at that moment wanted to do. Thus seduction is a union between reason and force, so as to make decisions using the latter to obtain a practical result with the former.'

Peter Lyssiotis

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## 1 "All that scratching is making me think..."

The dance music of today, as distinct from the earlier disco movement of the '70s, is replete with such a degree of sophistication in recording technique (dub, electro-beat effects) and, in the case of scratch-mixing, the actual performance of the records, that to ask the questions "What does it mean? What are its effects?" is also to ask, in parenthesis (What can we no longer believe in?)

For it's apparent to any open-minded observer that the dance music of the '80s incorporates all elements of the experimental repertoire (fragmentation, dislocation, multiplicity, quotation, creation of new forms from old) with an exuberance that's as compelling as the arsenal of distancing effects (usually attending their execution) is obsolete.

So to pass the sentence by writing it: in the field of popular music, an experimental or avant-garde attitude is now for us impossible, in the same way that narrative realism was 'impossible' for the literary semioticians of the '60s.

To uncover the reason for this, to understand the shift in the relation between a critical music theory or practice and the 'popular' order of music and its structures, it would be best to consider the scratch-mixing phenomenon: what does it do, how does it 'signify'?

This kind of mixing in discos plays gleefully with intertextuality, creating combinations only to dispel them, piling layer upon layer without stopping to admire the architecture, always transgressing the boundaries of 'individual' tracks: the whole night's music is one large and elaborate text, with any number of composite elements making up the pattern. Talk about **Death of the Author**: it's here, as far as the authors of the music are concerned—each song becomes one relativized piece in a shifting whole. This music is self-referential without the librarian's literalness, beyond the second degree without any hint of rigor-mortis, self-conscious without the manifestos, ebullient and fresh because of... (what?)—the beat. All the forms of production and mixing—dub, scratch, etcetera—are founded on the rock-steady beat.

And with the beat, of course, the dance—and the fundamental relation to pleasure which is the core of this music. None of the various effects are employed for their own sake or as part of an instructional strategy (nothing in the abstract); everything is subordinated to the pulse of the music, the rhythm which remains constant beneath the aural kaleidoscope of the mix, the beat to which... **the body moves.**



This is the thing: there is a direct commitment to pleasure in this music's insistence on the primacy of dance—but this in no way precludes the array of 'intertextual' techniques mentioned above. There is no place here for the shame-faced disavowal (or at least deep suspicion) of pleasure, which has in the past characterised exponents of music classed as either theory/practice essays, or just downright experimental. The major difference is, of course, that dance music doesn't constitute itself in opposition to anything; its use of techniques previously considered avant-garde is conditioned by its general character of affirmation. The practitioners of scratch don't take a critical distance from their objects: instead, the manifold voices and devices of popular music are made to coalesce in intriguing, startling patterns (through which bodies move). This is the attraction and force of this music (this is why we, long grown weary of the tiresome charades of experiment, avant-garde and underground, welcome it with such a relief).

# DANCE MANIA: CHAOS or CONTROL?

John Potts

## 2 "...Or How to Philosophise with a Beatbox."

For Nietzsche, music is the greatest of the arts because it is the least removed from the Dionysian condition, in which the 'entire emotional system is alerted and intensified'.<sup>1</sup> While the precondition for any authentic art is 'intoxication', the Dionysian state stands as the ultimate intoxication of the body and its powers of representation; the person so inspired possesses the highest capacity for communication and self-transformation: 'the essential thing remains... the incapacity **not** to react.'<sup>2</sup> Self-transformation involves the loss of ego-centric individuality (Dionysus is the fragmented god); it entails submersion into the greater rhythm, through the process of abandon, ecstasy (standing outside the self).

Music, then, in its engagement of the body, is the aesthetic form closest to this condition, but only as a 'vestige' of a much fuller world of expression, a 'mere residuum'.<sup>3</sup> Music is the first removal from this state, the first metaphor (and 'truth' itself is nothing but solidified metaphor); other modes of expression such as philosophical discourse operate at a greater distance: 'concepts are only metaphors of metaphors'.<sup>4</sup> For music to have become possible as a separate art, a process involving the immobilization of a number of senses had to take place—most particularly the muscular sense: music thus expresses disembodied movement, an echo of a more profound exaltation. This for Nietzsche was the power of music—the incitement to bodily expression wrought by the force of melody and rhythm: 'all rhythm speaks to our muscles to a certain extent.'<sup>5</sup>



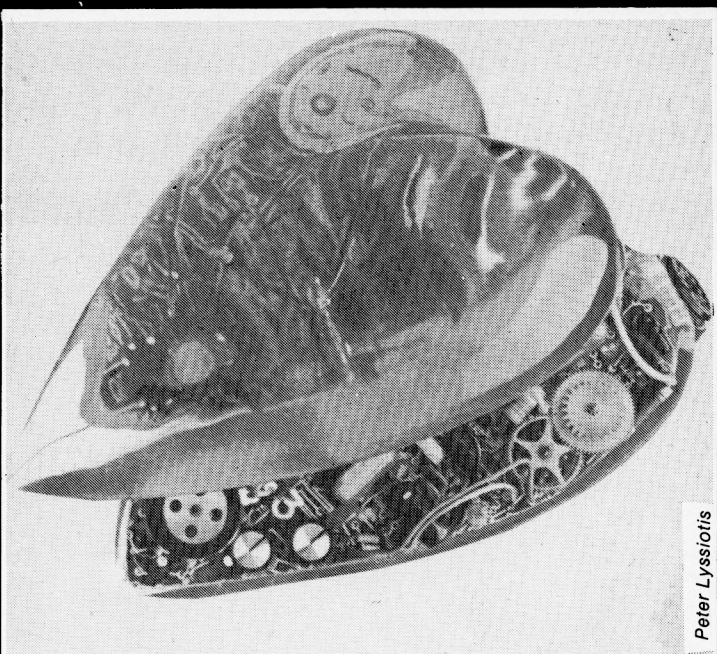
### 3 One Step Forward, One Step Back

She has danced into the danger zone  
when the dancer becomes the dance  
It can cut you like a knife  
if the gift becomes the fire  
on the wire between will and what will be  
She's a maniac, maniac on the floor...  
On the ice blue line of insanity  
is a place most never see  
It's a hard won place of mystery  
Touch it but can't hold it...

—'Maniac' by Michael Sembello, from **Flashdance**.

Is this the travesty of Dionysus? Or is it an antidote to philosophizing in a vacuum? The 'Maniac' song contains all the Dionysian recipe in its lyrics: the loss of the sovereign ego, the thrust of a greater 'will', the danger, even a hint of the ritual—but of course it must be considered squarely in its context of the massive corporate-controlled channelling of dance 'mania' into the programmed fantasy of **Flashdance** and the stream of video clips of a rock show like **Countdown**. In both these cases the song is ensconced in a vast framework within our electronic culture, the impetus of dance fuelling (and being fuelled by) a circulation of images ensuring the profitability of music films and television (and for Nietzsche, the visual arts were always Apollonian, ie., rationalistic, analytic). Or, more than this, the song could stand metonymically for a transformation of rhythm-as-repetition: from the mesmerizing insistence of the hypnotic dance (involving a certain **loss**), a captivating, energizing repetition, to that repetition which Roland Barthes has dubbed 'enclitic' (serving institutionalized power), the repetition of stereotype, mundanity, enervating persistence.

So what becomes of the disco in this light? What function can dance music be seen to serve? Let's hear the voice of the prosecution: In a disco, the dancing takes place in an enclosed space; the specific movements on the dance-floor are controlled by the rigid beat transmitted from the DJ's booth. This space symbolizes less a Dionysian rite than a microcosm of social control: the beat stands for the immanent societal mechanism that ensures conformity; the ostensible 'individuality' of each dancer's style is nothing but the illusion of 'freedom', the ideological veneer that covers the social machine. The mirrors and lighting induce nothing so much as a heightened narcissism; there is no release from subjecthood other than an increased alienation from the other dancers, all married to their own image. The music is monotonous, 'variety' is as regulated within the norm as it is in the stereotypical world of mass culture at large.



Peter Lyssiotis

### 4 Inside and Out

The lines are drawn; do we go this way or that? What do we make of it: a Bacchanalian revel or a model of mechanistic control? Is it a site of ego-loss, of plurality and subsumption, of an atomization like the violent flashing of the strobe? Or is it a domain of narcissism, of egos ricocheting back to themselves, like light bouncing back off mirrors? Is it the expression of the body, in a communal space with other bodies, or is it the simulacrum of alienation itself? Rhythmic ritual or factory-floor? Abandon or regulation?

Perhaps a more fruitful model is one not so polarized, or rather one which dissolves the poles, as it loses the addresses of subject and object: seduction. A critical position with regard to an object is necessarily a meta-position, an externality; yet the experience of dance is not so sharply defined. Getting on to the dance floor at first is like wading into a river: you must first get the feel of the movement (the rhythm), then you're swept along with it, seduced by the flow of the music until you acquiesce in it—and who is the subject, you or it? Or sometimes, if you're sitting down, a song can reach out and snatch at you, demanding your response, your allegiance, your movement. The Dionysian rite strictly has no audience (it is not 'diversion' in that sense, but **engagement**); the dancers move inside the rhythm, inside the music. And what would a writing be that emanated from within that rhythm, rather than outside it? Would it not be taking literally that exhortation made by Nietzsche and Derrida: **to dance with the pen**? (One step forward, one step back, inside and out...)

### Notes

1. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols (or How to Philosophize With a Hammer)*, Penguin, 1978, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, p.73.
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*
4. Sarah Kofman, 'Metaphor, Symbol, Metamorphosis' in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. D.E. Allison, Delta, 1977, p.201.
5. *Twilight*, p.73.

# RE/PERCUSSIONS:

## Drumming in the Age of Electronic Reproduction

Jody Berland

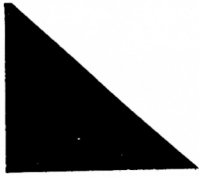
**HUMAN SCIENCE** begins when symbolic practices come to be seen as part of the production of man, the way that agricultural practices produce food, the way industrial practices produce cornflakes and Cadillacs. Culture produces symbols. This becomes the productive process privileged by a new civilization: civilizing, a kind of rapturous human engineering. The image of **production** enters the language of philosophy, under the sponsorship of anthropology, and bestows a newly secular function upon creativity. The creation of sounds, images, narratives—these fulfill the spectacular function of civilizing man, falling co-operatively into alliance with the parallel process of man civilizing nature, building and working with machines, learning the gestures of their manipulation.

Hands learn to signal command indirectly, within the mechanisms of production; bodies learn to order themselves as extensions of those mechanisms. But not only earth, coal or cotton, find themselves thus transformed by the fires of a murderous and necessary progress. Movement, language and symbol also become the raw material for appropriation, an appropriation made possible by their new mobility of meaning, an appropriation made tangible by the mechanisms of commerce and of ideology, an appropriation made essential to the transformative glories of capitalism—and rendered volatile by its sufferers and by its opponents, whose desire and whose rage would fuel the unending proliferation of compensatory illusions.

Tonality, transport, technique—evolutionary laws are found for each, rendering communication ever more efficient. Upon their affinities, **humanism** cements its metaphysical optimism, joining together the buoyant pillars of anthropological benevolence (we grow more civilized each season) and industrial progress, which makes everything possible. Anthropology and industry, man and machine, each becomes an alibi for the actions of each other; and their testimony posits democracy at the table of judgement, that table from which the jury is temporarily absent, that table which is everyday life.





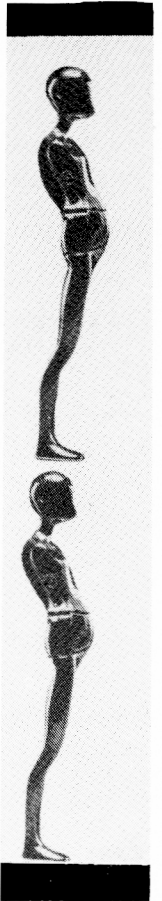


**March, 1913:** precisely 70 years ago, the Italian Futurist, painter and erstwhile musician, Luigi Russolo, wrote and distributed—en masse, naturally—**The Art of Noises**, proposing the construction of a new music that would meet the challenge of the mass-industrial age, by making machinery not only the content, but also the inspiration and generating source of sound. In this celebration of the machine, Russolo lambasted composers for their perpetuation of obsolete harmonies and forms, and insisted on a music that could recreate the drama of industrial construction through the liberation of sound. Pratella, the Futurist composer to whom the manifesto is addressed, was later to deny having expressed such an interest in 'a rapport between music and machines': 'In the field of music I tend to recreate the world humanly and never to go against humanity and therefore against nature...' No matter: the orchestra of **intonarumori** was duly built, a quixotic instrument/machine hybrid of noise-makers, with the enthusiastic support of Marinetti, and in accordance with the principle that contemporary music could only progress with 'the supplementary use of noise and its substitution for musical sounds'.

Composers everywhere began to express their discontent with the purity of 'absolute music' and its harmonious, logical, progressive architecture. With the Futurists, the new technology of global industry entered the central nervous system of musical culture, where it remains, at its contested heart: as instrument, tool, procedure, producer, designer, distributor. And as **sign**, **subject**, and **arbiter** of power.

'Let us therefore invite young musicians of genius and audacity to listen attentively to all noises... Our increased perceptivity, which has already acquired futurist eyes, will then have futurist ears. Thus the motors and machines of industrial cities may someday be intelligently pitched, so as to make of every factory, an intoxicating orchestra of noises.'

— Russolo, *The Art of Noises*



'August, 1940: As a result of investigations conducted by Harold Nicolson, Parliamentary Secretary to the (U.S.) Ministry of Information, it is announced that the playing of music by Chopin and Rachmaninov in munitions factories produces an increase of the output from 6 to 12%.'

— N. Slonimsky, *Music Since 1900*

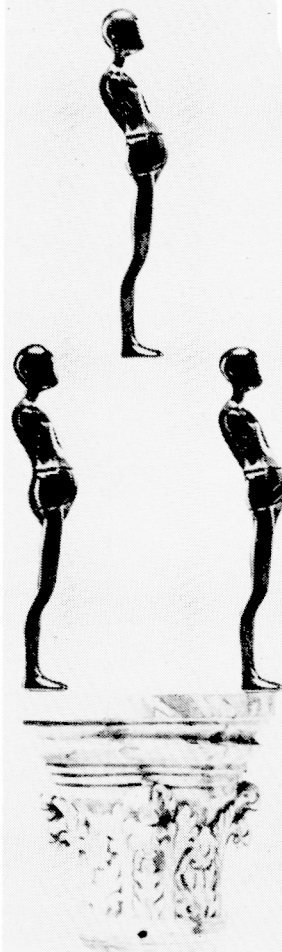
## Subject

The self-containedness of 'serious' music has worked to set music into a frame apart from the listener's everyday life; the music, compelling admiration by its artful and complex elaboration, refuses to belong to any particular time and place. We attend concerts to hear religious, political, any type of music—masses, wedding marches, overtures, military themes. Or, we can hear music on a record, any time of day, any place, driving in our cars, lonely in our bathrooms, respectfully silent in attendance before the event: we are being communicated to. The composer has a problem, and we hear him fighting with it, we hear him fighting it when sitting in the car or silent in the chair. That is what defines its 'seriousness': that it is his, and that it belongs nowhere.

What we call contemporary music is that which descends from the introduction of this problem: how to mark such a musical 'event' without insisting on a point of departure, direction, or goal. Many composers have rejected the confident movement towards resolution inherent in tonal harmony, and the emphasis on harmonic/melodic relations which provided the basis for that movement for several centuries. John Cage sought to free sound from **all** rational hierarchies, from the tyranny of progress in the structured duration of sound. In the arbitrariness of its gestures, Cage's proposal for a process of making without subject, memory, or history, a process designed to 'leave no traces' as he put it, marks a conspicuous moment in this philosophical rejection. Of course, this is still a moment within a tradition: the 'tradition' of Russolo, of Partch and Satie, the tradition now of Cage himself. Still, it's a moment of refusal.

The paradox for devotees of this tradition has been how to negate the imperative of cumulative history and history-making; particularly, how to reject the teleology implied by progressive, logical relations in sound structures without neutralizing the music maker into oblivion. In some instances, technologically determined arrangements of sound elements took care of this problem by neutralizing the music-maker into a computer printout, his 'traces' hidden in the shadow of a negative intent.

But changes in artistic intent cannot explain away the dynamics of this history, any better than those declarations of the 'end of ideology' could reveal what happened to emancipatory, political movements or programs in the 1950s which invited such complacent epitaphs to the memory of Utopia. The irony is, in Africa, Jamaica, the Third World generally, there was movement, they were moving—while America's artists were looking for ways to advance, but without direction, without taking any incriminating steps. Whether in solidarity with Third World revolution, or in affinity with their own climactic atmosphere of cultural imperialism, many embraced the symbols of non-Western wisdoms in an enthusiastic sublimation of self-obliteration.



'Needs—such as they are—can no longer be defined adequately in terms of the naturalist-idealist thesis—as innate, instinctive power, spontaneous craving, anthropological potentiality. Rather, they are better defined as a **function** induced in the individual by the internal logic of the system: more precisely, not as a consummative force liberated by the affluent society, but as a productive force required by the functioning of the system itself.'

— Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*



'I believe that non-Western music is currently the single most important source of new ideas for Western composers and musicians.'

— Steve Reich

'Whereas the Enlightenment idealized classical antiquity and had begun to investigate other cultures, the romantics went a step further. They tended to promote the discussion of exotic times and places as a device for criticizing contemporary life, to a search for any civilization deserving emulation. This tendency has had many effects. One is the idealization of the primitive, childlike, and spontaneous qualities, which Westerners sometimes see in other cultures. Another is the search for nonartificial and inward products of Western culture to counter what seems to be the technological and aggressive mainstream.'

— Conrad Donakowski



'In the electric age, when our central nervous system is technologically extended to involve us in the whole of mankind and to incorporate the whole of mankind in us, we necessarily participate, in depth, in the consequences of our every action. It is no longer possible to adopt the aloof and dissociated role of the literate Westerner.'

— Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*

'Just as water, gas and electricity are brought into our houses from afar to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign.'

— Paul Valéry



'The sign object is neither given nor exchanged: it is appropriated, withheld and manipulated by individual subjects as a sign, that is, as coded difference. Here lies the object of consumption. And it is always of and from a reified, abolished social relationship that is "signified" in a code.'

— Jean Baudrillard

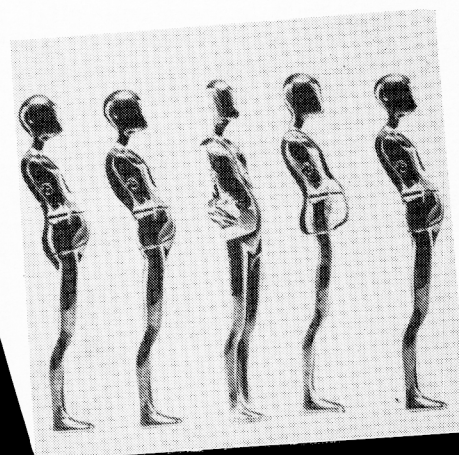


## Sign

Everywhere musicians are **drumming**. Polyphonies of percussion: the returning to the roots of music; the waving flag of Third World solidarity; the fusion of the global village. Drumming functions within our musical-semiotic system as a technologically constituted primitivism. A new map of cultures is sounded, in which Africa and Jamaica threaten to explode the bland Westernness of the globe. This is not a celebration of the machine, but an onslaught against it—using its most advanced electronic apparatuses to join together the global network of explorers, rebels, appropriators, consumers.

Drumming has been introduced to contemporary music from a number of sources: ethnological expeditions to Africa. Jazz. Reggae. West-Indian and British immigration. Then, by composers such as Steve Reich, whose **drumming** is more a sculptural representation of African rhythmic structures without their heat, an appropriation of African ritual for Western ears, ears without bodies, ears bent to the conceptual frame of sound evolution and structural change, but feeling guilty about it.

Contemporary drumming restores the intransigent physicality of rhythm, the textures of sound demanding physical surrender, implicating the gestures of movement (making or listening) in a physiology of retaliation. You jack up the volume and the floors shake. You cannot sit still. Submitting to the power of its demands, you pay homage to the primitive cult of ritual exorcism. The sound is itself freedom from the context of that cult. And thus freed, what does the sound mean?: elegy? attack? advertisement? Solidarity or cultural theft?



'If you play a recording of American jazz for an African friend, even though all the formal characteristics of African music are there, he may say, as he sits fidgeting in his chair, "What are we supposed to do with this?" He is expressing perhaps the most fundamental aesthetic in Africa: without participation, there is no meaning... Rhythm is the most perceptible and the least material thing.'

— John Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*

'For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility... But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics.'

— Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

**ARBITER**  
the resonance of recorded exchange

**ARBITER**  
the resonance of recorded exchange

Between 1955 and 1962 there were over 300,000 migrants from the Caribbean to Britain, of whom almost 200,000 came from Jamaica. Enough to make Jamaican music a major presence in the musical lives and conflicts of British cities.

They lived in a prosperous nation but they were not prosperous. Jamaicans provided a model for musical performance the way that African and Afri-American music had provided a model in Jamaica in an earlier time. They wanted a music that would express and intensify their political experiences and aspirations. They began experimenting with different recording techniques in order to intensify the effects of the music. They followed very closely the music being produced in Jamaica. They all had record players.

Instead of ritual, we have environment: sound fills the cavernous spaces between our ears and the late afternoon. People in Ontario listen to records that speak as though from a long way off. Using old instruments, but echoed through the resonance of new ones, the 'here-and-nowness' of rhythmic argument is brought to us in a hum of contemplation. Perhaps this is what Eno-Hassell meant by "Fourth World (Possible Musics)", or WOMAD by "World of Music, Arts and Dance": the meeting takes place on the record, as a proposition, with all the seductive connotations that implies. They record an emblem, an advertisement for something that is (or might be) lost. They envelope borrowed bravery with tears. But who's crying?

The meeting of East and West = **melancholic urgency** + the warning drone of drums.

In past decades, action painting and performance art attempted the articulation of physical gesture in order to restore the dubious unity between self, act and meaning. Hence, the representation of a lack, evoking nature as the token of lost innocence. This apparent withdrawal from the system organizes its negativity in the matrix of another system: the artist's signature bestows authenticity on the act of renouncing, and names the act as meaningful within the alternative system thus created: that of the artist, that of the ostensible intelligibility of his expression.

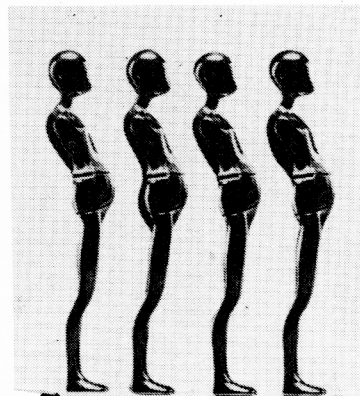
Conceptual art was no less committed to an aesthetic essentialism than action painting, which it disdained. But it set up a different set of boundaries, and represented the brain as a technology to be fought over—an apt disclosure for a culture that had been syphoned through McLuhan's Penguin paperback. I dislike art-historical analogies, but perhaps there is a similarity in the way new music confronts its own tradition. Rather than threatening to make a myth of its own intelligence, recent North American music holds forth an image of the Third World as a hostage, to avert rejoinder.

Where does one receive the licence to kidnap? Is it endowed by the conservatory, or perhaps by the bank? Is it the record companies that are rescued, or our memory? When does this rhythm cease to be hostage, and speak with its own voice?

'To rewrite the concept of a management of desire in social terms now allows us to think repression and wish-fulfillment together within the unity of a single mechanism, which gives and takes alike in a kind of psychic compromise or horse-trading, which strategically arouses fantasy content within careful symbolic containment structures which defuse it, gratifying intolerable, unrealizable, properly imperishable desires only to the degree to which they can again be laid to rest.'

— Frederic Jameson, *Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture*

Drumming collectivizes the gesture, and draws Africa into the lexicon of its design. The reference is externalized: not the body, but the body politic. Its authenticity is guaranteed by the fractured geography of revolution. In the city, tourists saunter to the record shops to purchase their solidarity. Volcanoes flatten to the touch. In the city, the clusters of bodies and faces, the mix of colours, the shaking walls, the angry dance: a storm gathers. If action painting was the ruminative sigh of the cold war, **drumming** is the ambiguous recorded shriek of the global village, made legible by the flourish of a signature.



Peter Lyssiotis



# FROM SURF CITY TO THE

The records surface from the bottom of old collections on those nostalgic evenings, to aid reminiscences of a lost optimism, of a Golden Age of endless summers and surfaris up the north coast in 'woodies' and battered Holdens. The sounds recall memories of uncrowded waves and the well-fed bodies of surfer girls, bred in the 'age of affluence', the boom period following the Second World War. To listen now to the recordings of **The Renegades**, **The Atlantics** or **Digger Revell and the Denvermen**, can simply be an invitation to turn off the stereo. Without the memories, 'Robert Helpmann Goes Surfing' and **Little Patti's** 'Stomp in at Maroubra' have 'weird' or 'cute' connotations respectively, but this appeal seems to dwindle.

For analysts of the history of popular music, the genre of surfing has generally remained submerged, as though we defer to the 'inbuilt obsolescence' of popular culture—where epitaphs are inscribed in the process of production/consumption; the breezy creations, intensely digested for short periods and quickly replaced. The standards of classical aesthetics are little help in recreating the popular sounds of a past time. The generally internalized analyses of harmonies, rhythm, instrumentation etc., and the placement of music in the Great Tradition, refers to a practice of permanently reactivating and recreating class-cultural histories. The implication underlying most musicology is that 'meaning' is immanent, registered somewhere outside of time and place, inscribed upon a score or even upon vinyl grooves. But this still predominant aesthetic suggests a different mode of musical 'appreciation'; the search for the mechanisms of 'transcendence' lies in a separate critical undertaking.

To interpret surfing music—to understand its birth, death and its partial reincarnation in the mid-1970s—is to analyse the sounds and more broadly the culture of which it was a part, as a social and historical practice. Music, as sounds organized over, through and in time, has "meaning only for so long as the social conditions of their social existence last", and change.<sup>1</sup> That is, we can take surfing music beyond the records left to us, beyond our distaste or pleasure, to an understanding of surf music as part of a cultural phenomenon on the beaches of California and Australia. In one sense, it is a way of separating popular music from the ossification of an internalized musical tradition and replacing it in the wider arena of history.

Surfing music occupies an elusive space as a form of popular culture. It existed as a specific genre for only a few years, from 1962-1964/65, when fashions, rituals and music merged around the image of the beach. Surfing began to appeal as a style, a 'fad', to those not previously involved in the culture on the beaches of Sydney and scattered towns along the coast. In this sense, surfing music acted as a form of local imperialism. But the imperialistic 'drive' was complicated by the American/Australian axis, and the fact that the music arrived in Sydney as an import, as a deliberate attempt by pop entrepreneurs to create a new market. The relations between surfing music and social history thus suggest a few possible themes: the idea of a 'double' imperialism operating in a specific setting and the effects of this process upon the original surfing culture. While surfing music appeared to 'die' by 1966, elements of the earlier sound were revived a decade later by a 'surfing' band, **Midnight Oil**. In their musical practice, the themes of imperialism and commercialization return, brought to consciousness as an attempted critique of the music industry and contemporary politics. Their attempt, however, is full of contradictions, and takes us to another set of problems. The following pages attempt to suggest that one way of understanding popular



Stompathon, Surf City 1964

# ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE:

music is to look at a distinct form—surfing music, for example—rather than engage with transcendental and ahistorical generalizations, and that questions of 'meaning' and 'function' can be answered only in a shifting and historical way.

Surfing music originated in California, initially as the soundtrack to movies like Bud Browne's 'Big Surf' (1943) and 'Hawaiian Memories' (1945). Film-makers experimented with jazz, even with Vivaldi, but as the surfing movie acquired more than an eccentric existence, a distinctive instrumental sound developed. Frenetic drums, electric guitars (with emphasized treble), bass (utilizing the reverb switch on the amplifier) and occasionally an organ, provided the basic technology of the surfing band. Along the Californian coast, the music was part of a broader process of subcultural signification. Malibus, boardshorts, bleached hair, Mexican sandals, woodies, weeniebakes and beach parties were loaded with meanings beyond a simple functionalism. The practice of surfing and the subcultural style which surrounded it was an attempt to defy 1950s conventions. The surfers' tramp-like mobility, their denial of the work ethic and the well-publicized 'irresponsible' actions, generated anxiety, popularity and commercial interest. 'Jan and Dean' and 'The Beach Boys' in the early 1960s did not spring rootless from the sand dunes, but responded to the popularity of the surfing culture, to a need for musical articulation (now with lyrics), and became a major part of the ongoing commercialization of a localized culture.

In Australia, the growth of the surfing subculture happened later, dependent as it was on the technological innovation of the Malibu board (a Californian creation, replacing redwood with fibreglass and balsa), and the take-off of local production in 1957. It was also hampered by the resistance of the life-saving movement to the implicit hedonism and individuality of riding surfboards, as young surfers at this stage were life-savers as well. In the late 1950s the effects of economic growth, the expansion of secondary industries and foreign investment (from the United States and Japan), and the concomitant ideological shift away from Depression and wartime austerity was evidenced by conspicuous consumption and a heightened sense of 'individuality', expressed through a changing lexicon of material goods. The profusion of teenage 'fads' as well as the more complex and long-lived youth cultures, could be understood as both a creation of, and a response to this change. Indeed, the proliferation of discourse about the 'teenager' was a way of conceptualizing and containing such ideological and demographic changes. The shift was also away from Britain, as the mother country, to America, as a model of modernity, and cultural entrepreneurs concerned with the teenage market looked to America as a guide. As a disc jockey for the Sydney radio station 2SM said in 1963:

I could see the surfing music craze coming in (from California) as long ago as last March. I immediately put the studio behind it, and our jockeys played it hard and fast...<sup>2</sup>

The implanting of American popular culture in Australia could be seen as a part of a broader imperialistic drive. Political alliances, cold-war ideology and transactions of capital 'speak' at a number of levels, and popular music was far from immune.

In 1963, the Top 40 charts recorded a veritable take-over by the Californian sound—**The Chantays'** 'Pipeline', **The Beach Boys'** 'Surfin' USA', **The Surfaris'** 'Wipeout' and **Jan and Dean's** 'Surf City'. After the decline of the 'twist' in the early 1960s, Australian rock n' roll had entered a fairly sparse creative period, and the local growth of surfing along with the success of



surfing music in California suggested possibilities. EMI released sixteen hit records in Australia, like 'Sax Now, Surf Later' by **Hang Ten Horowitz**, and 'Some Gremmie Stole My Hair Bleach' by **Knot Knees McGurdy and the Drop Outs**. The Australian response was not only to buy the records, but to develop surfing bands. The musical differences were minimal and only the names of the beaches served to distinguish California from New South Wales. 'The Bondi Stomp', 'Avalon Stomp', 'Surfin Down Under' and 'My Little Rocker's Turned Surfie' (a problem peculiar to Australia), were the local products following in the wake of **Jan and Dean's** major success in early 1963, 'Surf City'. With **The Beach Boys**, **Jan and Dean** had developed a distinctive style—falsetto above the eternal R n' R I, IV, V progression with lyrics which celebrated the surfing life. The music isolated key objects and practices, romanticizing and mythologizing the beach. But it was **Jan and Dean's** 'Surf City' which clustered almost every element of the lifestyle, linked by the predominant male fantasy of the chorus—'Two Girls for Every Boy'.

Its popularity inspired a transformation of 'The Birdcage', a twisting nightclub in Kings Cross, into a live venue, 'Surf City'. Attired in the surfing fashion of 1963/64—midriff tops, pedal pushers, boardshorts, barefeet—teenagers attended to the rite of the 'stomp'. Two stomps on the right foot, two on the left, to the music of bands like **The Atlantics**, **The Silhouettes**, **Billy Thorpe** and **the Aztecs** and **Little Patti**. 'Surf City' was patrolled by figures of discipline, dressed as life-savers, searching dark corners for illicit sexual activity and



alcohol. The choice of life-saver implies more than a touch of entrepreneurial authenticity. Life-savers carried an image consolidated in the 1930s of conservatism, moral and physical strength and order. Their role was that of 'bouncer', to protect the style and patrons of 'Surf City', but they also served to placate the moral anxiety of parents, pulpits and para-religious organizations. 'Surf City' suggests too, the fragility of the early years of pop music. Faith was not yet secure that the pleasures of the new dancing would not unleash uncontrollable desires. Teenagers were the subject of contradictory elements of the ideology: wild and unruly creatures with too much money and freedom (James Dean), as well as being symbols of the new affluence, 'our children' (the wholesomeness of **The Beach Boys**). The life-saver was a figure of control. But his presence at 'Surf City' and the surf music phenomenon itself, makes little sense without considering the response of the 'original' surfers to the take-over of their culture.

As in California, the popularity of boardriding had increased dramatically with the appearance of surfing and its lifestyle in film, magazines, television serials and the aural saturation via radio, milk-bar juke-boxes, portable record-players and Bandstand's promotion of 'wild surf sounds'. This mediated, American cultural imperialism drew crowds of teenagers to the beaches, not in pursuit of the perfect wave, but of a cult identity. To use the word 'imperialism' is to summon images of monolithic domination. But imperialism can also meet indigenous traditions and generate resistance; not, at this stage, in Australian surf music, but amongst surfers. The cult following of the surf forced 'true' surfers to define themselves through various modes of authentication. The rise of 'localism', for example, was a part of this effect; a xenophobic and often violent distaste for the 'pseuds' or 'surfies', who did not live near the beach and were mere commercial products—the kind who were drawn to 'Surf City'. This is not to suggest that the original surfers were beyond the reach of the commercial apparatus—the concept of the 'cool' and the image of the 'real' changed content frequently. Identity was also tested and proven in clashes between surfers and Rockers, aggressive interchanges between two opposing cultures on the beaches in 1964.

Other expressions of authenticity were less violently displayed towards outsiders and had been developing within a different frame-work. The surf club dances, for instance, had gained a certain notoriety due to the imbibing of alcohol and the 'gang-bang' rituals of many surfers. (At some place near the surf club—the sand dunes, the toilet, the rocks—a woman would be 'selected' to serve at the end of a queue of young surfers. Not unlike the phenomenon Johnny O'Keefe recalled of his performances, when lines would form outside the men's toilet to gain relief from a woman, often an unsuccessful 'groupie', driven to sexual frenzy by the sound of J.O'K. and his leopard-patterned suit.) Such practices of independence were directed against the life-saving body (of whom they had been a part until the mass exodus in 1963) and the female body (who, up until 1963/64, had been active in the waves, riding boards). It is as though the perceived intrusion of commercialization was interpreted (perhaps rightly) as an attempt at pacification—the 'emasculatation' of a culture. The response was a reassertion of dominance—over women, over 'eggs' and 'kooks' (surfers from the outside), and against their place in traditional beach culture by the cultivation of a marginal position. (The status of the life-saver began to be questioned on that delicate and visible area—masculine sexuality. Suggestions of homosexuality implicit in the teamwork and camaraderie of life-saving began to appear around this time.)

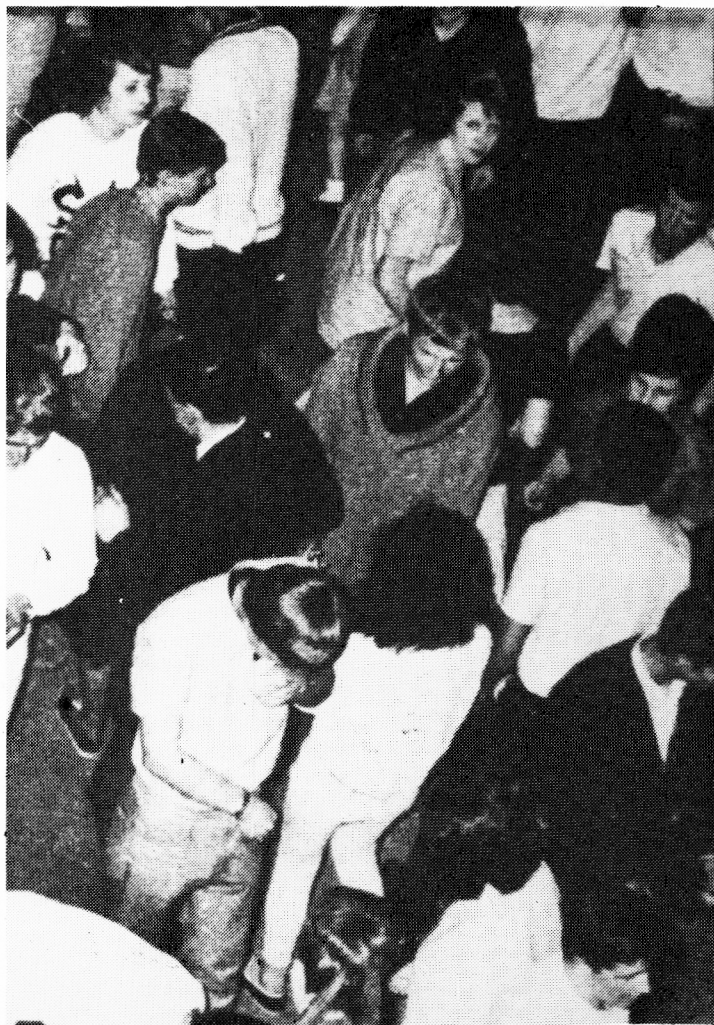
Surfing music, as a part of the 'Americanization' and commercialization of the beach, was gradually rejected or treated with amused ironic contempt. There was no continuity of the genre, even though the potential conditions for its development remained. For surfers, the music which had taken their name and debased

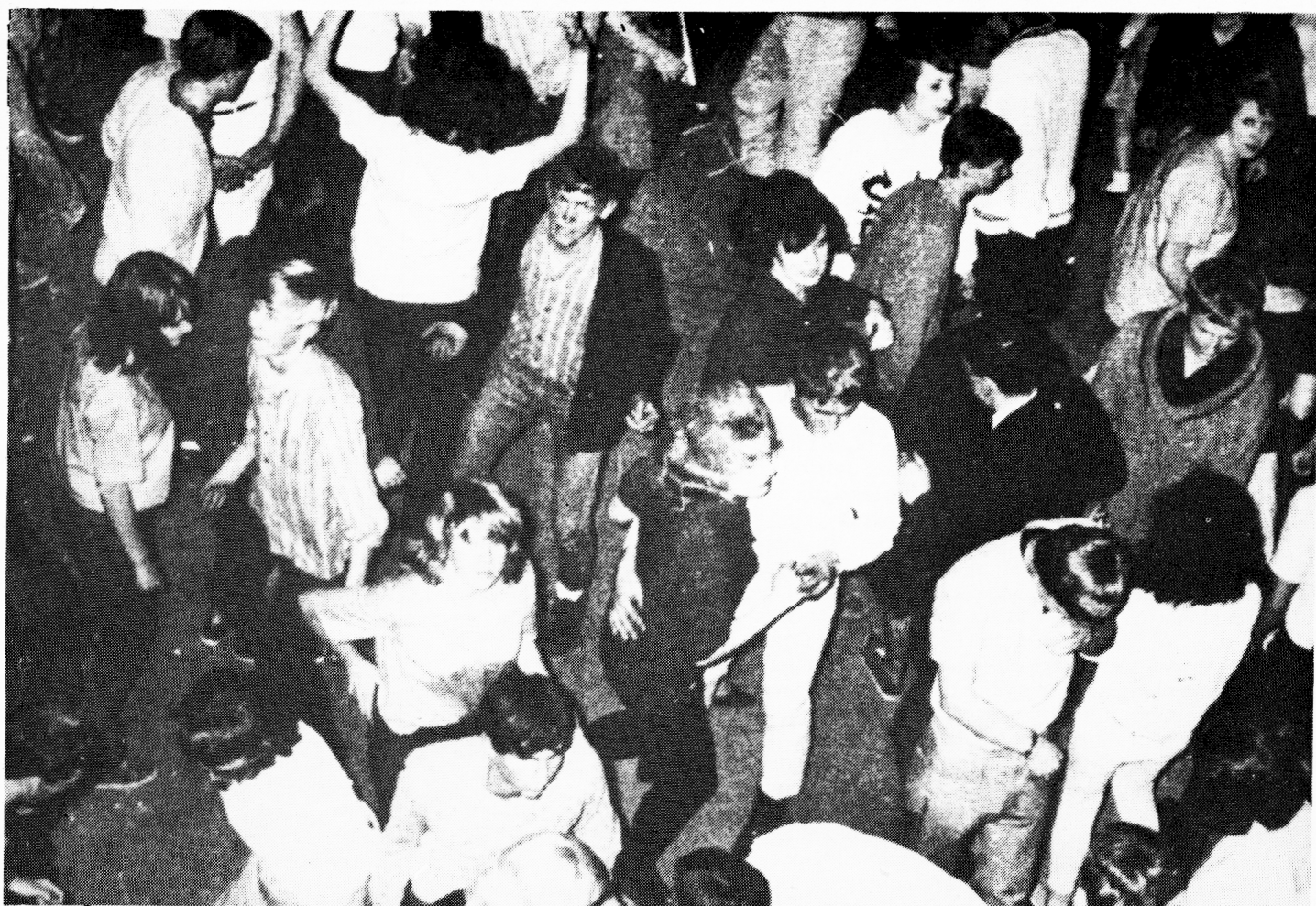
their activities, became important in a negative sense. The enemy could be defined, as sounds and symbols, and thus so could the 'real' surfer—as shifting and impermanent as this construct was.

By 1965, the sound of the surf was dying as a major source of profit for the pop music industry. **The Beach Boys** paddled towards the shore and 'Surf City' closed down. The surfing subculture had been activated and passed through many phases—social acceptance and disapproval, drugs and the counter-cultural communities along the East Coast, avoiding the draft by following the waves, refusing a place in conservative national iconography by anarchic organization and a denial (until recently) of the 'spirit' of professional sport.

The commercial and imperial intrusion in the early 1960s had given the surfing subculture a marginal and self-consciously rebellious image. Surprisingly perhaps, music was not part of the surfies' 'resisting practices', at least not in a distinctive 'surf music' form. It took a decade for consciousness of these origins to float towards a musical expression. The politics of origin and their effects (external-local-rebellion) were relocated through the musical activities of **Midnight Oil**. In a sense, the band's existence was another attempt to express marginal identity, to continue the 'rebellious' image of the surfer and avoid absorption into 'mainstream Australia'.

In the mid-1970s, as part of the explosion of Oz Rock and punk 'anger', **Midnight Oil** began to play at pubs along the beaches of Sydney. The members of the band had their bases in the surfing subculture, and from gigs at their local hotel, the 'Narabeen Antler', gained a strong following amongst surfers. Their sound was generically rock n' roll, with harmonies and a bass guitar reminiscent of **Jan and Dean** or **The Atlantics**. ('Wedding Cake Island', for example, an early **Oils** instrumental 'evocation' of Coogee Bay, derives more from surfing music of the 1960s than developments in





the '70s.) Their early music enunciated the concerns of surfers, echoing attitudes about work, lifestyle and the beach mentality. By their second album, the 'content' of the songs associated the beach imagery with 'political' issues and observations about powerlessness and alienation. The **Oils** even entwined a critique of their origins within the music—suggestions that the hedonism of the beach had pacified anger, history and thought. ('Too much of sunshine, too much of sky/It's just enough to make you want to cry': *The Power and the Passion*.)

**Midnight Oil** made their reputation partly by refusing to work within the boundaries set by the music industry. In the early years, they recorded on their own label and refused to appear on 'Countdown'; in later ones, they chose to perform under their own conditions, giving concerts for the unemployed, unadvertised gigs for surfers, and pursuing a policy of self-management. Their radical image was also made by the lead singer, Peter Garrett, whose exuberant gyrations recall a stomp gone wild. In the era of high tech sound—the multiplication of synthesizers and drum machines, the cultivation of a non-emotion—**Midnight Oil** refused to capitulate. ("They're just British hairdressers with synthesizers" said the bald Garrett about the newest wave in a recent interview.<sup>3</sup>) As lyrics have become more oblique, defying definitive interpretation, the **Oil's** lyrics have become increasingly pointed:

'The rich get richer, the poor get the picture,  
The bombs never hit you when you're down so low...'

'Read About It'

**Midnight Oil's** strategy of granting only selective interviews suggests an understanding of the way in which popular music is constructed. It is not as if the popularity and 'meaning' of the sounds are separate from the circulation of ideas and commentaries upon them. The lack of interest shown by 'Countdown' was advertised as a triumph, as was the success of journalists in actually getting Peter Garrett to speak. His choice of place—occasionally **Tracks**, **Rolling Stone** and left-wing papers like **Tribune**—was conscious and

deliberate. But this did not stop anyone from writing about the **Oils** in whatever manner they desired, nor did it avoid the cultivation of an image amongst their following. In a sense, recuperation operates by default. The **Oils** acquire an uncontrollable presence by their rare appearances, in both the press and on stage. Even the practice of the unadvertised gig, designed to stop the hordes and reward long-serving local devotees, creates an allure and mystique. (Rumours abound on the northern beaches about secret concerts, and the excitement of rumour—'Is it true? Have you heard?'—is all the more powerful when it turns out to be false. As if the **Oils** recognize that desire loses power once satisfied.

At one level, **Midnight Oil's** consciousness of the mechanisms of the pop music industry, the cultivation of success by large record companies, the control of advertising, distribution, timing and appearances, suggests a step in the 'right direction' (wherever that may be. Somewhere away from 'domination' and towards 'autonomy'?) But rather than applaud, it may be more useful to raise some questions. How can we account for the distribution of their last album, '10,9,8,7,6...' through CBS rather than their own label, Powderworks? The rationalization was the 'message'—the most 'political' album had to 'get out there'—and CBS had the means to take the **Oils** to the hit parade. The countdown of the title remains a jab at Molly Meldrum, but it is also a title of defeat, as it was their resistance to commercial success which gave them credibility amongst their local following. And Meldrum recognized this by giving the **Oils** a special prize at the Countdown awards in early 1984... One can 'sell out' it seems, even without Molly. But the concept of 'sell out' itself implies that authentic resistance is actually possible. In the present conditions of pop, perhaps there is no way of escaping contradictions—maybe just beating the capitalist/record company/rock journalist to the punch, and then succumbing to the breakdown.

There is a strand of analysis, a kind of Marxist humanism, which still believes that the revolution is around the corner, and that maybe the new protagonists



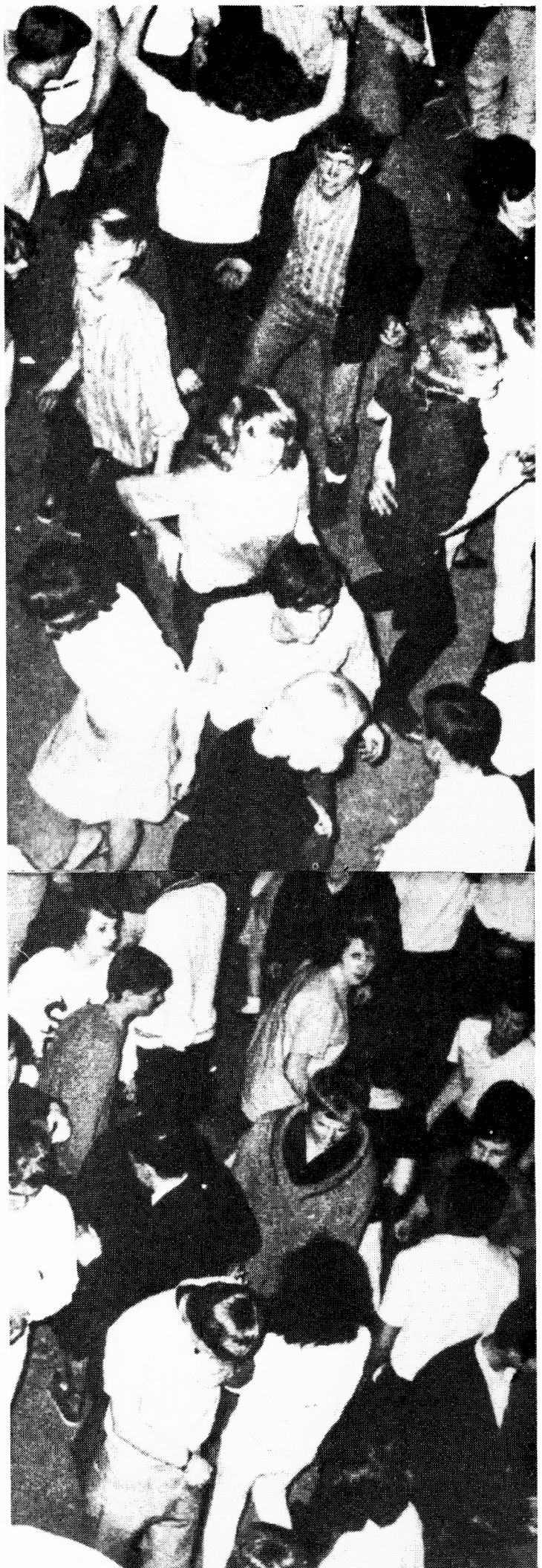
are pop musicians, preferably with roots in a 'real' working class.<sup>4</sup> Bands like **Redgum**, **The Clash** and the **Sex Pistols** are dubbed 'political' because of their shock tactics and stylistic innovations, or because of the 'content', the lyrics of rebellion. **Midnight Oil** fits the category too. Their songs are loaded with such 'political messages', pointing bones at the enemy and itemizing their misdeeds—the bosses and the media ('Read About It'), the U.S. and Nuclear War ('U.S. Forces'), imperialism and war ('Short Memory'), alienation ('The Outside World'). But it is too simple to conflate the content of songs with political strategies, even when they are linked to a resisting practice. Between authorial intent and the act of reception lies an unknown and unpredictable gap. There is obviously a market for 'political awareness', but the connection between declamation and political change is far from apparent.

**Midnight Oil** appear to score another point too. Their music has avoided representing women, talking about love, pain or romance. But even at the level of content, they have not tackled the issue. They avoid it. And if we take the music beyond its 'score' to its performance and reception, another question arises. Where are the women at the **Oils** concerts? It has been noted by the occasional journalist, and one had only to be present at the early Antler gigs or at the Entertainment Centre in 1983, to witness the lack of women and the proliferation of men, linking arms in circles of ten or more, swaying and chanting, a strange practice of male bonding, a powerful sensation—but, a political one? And how can a band who pride themselves on their anti-commercial stance rationalize a performance in the Sydney Entertainment Centre to 12,000 people? The concept behind the concert was an anti-nuclear rally, but while Peter Garrett was 'raising awareness', the audience was generally drunk, lighting joints and screaming 'Boring'. The sound of choppers was meant to summon threatening images of America and Vietnam, but the kids were munching Big Macs. 'U.S. Forces' had the coliseum rocking, but plans were underway for a 'selective' onslaught of the American market in 1984. And even if consciousness was raised, and anger aroused, does this have any long-term efficacy, or does it disappear in the blur of the hangover?

In one sense, **Midnight Oil** drew upon their surfing roots. They historicized the culture by relocating old sounds, by making conscious themes—imperialism and commercialization—which partly summoned the surfing subculture into being in Australia. An earlier attempt at resisting domination, the effect of 'Surf City' on local surfers, was reincarnated and turned upon itself. The **Oil's** criticisms were directed as much towards the apolitical surfer as they were against the 'forces of evil'. But the contradictions multiply, and defeat seems unavoidable—perhaps even necessary, given the position of popular music in contemporary society. But the **Oils** co-optation need not lead to an Adornian pessimism about pop music's inability to do anything but reproduce barbaric conditions. The example, the 'meaning' of their music perhaps, can raise questions about pop political strategies and their efficacy.

#### Endnotes

1. Dick Bradley, 'The Cultural Study of Music: A Theoretical and Methodological Introduction', *Occasional Papers* no. 61, 1982, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.
2. Charles Higham, 'The Cult of the Surfie', *Bulletin*, Nov. 23, 1963.
3. Hedda Moye, Peter Garrett interview, *Tracks*, January 1984.
4. See Dick Hebdige's 'Reggae, Rastas and Rudies', *Occasional Papers*, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, no. 24, 1978; his *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London 1979; and Julie Birchill and Tony Parsons' *The Boy Looked at Johnny*, Pluto Press, 1978.



# fascist groove thang

**The following article is a slightly revised version of a live review which appeared soon after a concert performance by S.P.K. at the Sydney Trade Union Club, where a number of people were injured.**

After leaving Australia, it's ironic that the entity known as S.P.K. found their (dis)ambience in the grey reactionary drift of depression England, the perfect climate to nurture their Teutonic influences into maturity. As a band they've reached the point where the avant-garde becomes the rear guard, where fascism masks its ugly face in the chic illusions of a 'radical' art—the same illusions which have permeated underground culture with the self-satisfied assumption that obscurity and the nouveau-left march hand-in-hand. No questions asked.

Behind the artifice, ambiguity and obfuscation of S.P.K., there's nothing more than a disgusting pile of anti-life shit, neatly rationalising itself with the veneer of intellectual radicalism. Words like 'provocative' and 'shocking' wear well with them—cause for artistic smugness, no doubt. But they're empty catchwords really, emotive responses to their knee-jerk art for voyeurs in need of an excuse. Some perversity in S.P.K. (and there are many) seems to provoke them into thinking their ugliness and violence is some kind of critical revelation. The sad truth is it's a celebration, as old as blood-lust and as expediently and brutally justified as any Nazi could reason.

S.P.K. have moved on from their industrial noise into 'Metal Dance', marrying their earlier discord and harshness to disco. In interviews they've described it as a tactical manoeuvre to help finance their more 'progressive' (mis)adventures, a crafty division of interests that also unconsciously articulates their conservatism in terms of attitudes to the elite nature of 'true art' and the inherent inferiority of popular forms. Something also reflected in their willingness to physically injure members of the audience, a symptom of an attitude that must inevitably place Art above humanity, giving them the opportunity to act out their wet-dreams of domination.

Though they would probably resent the implication, their variation of dance owes quite a bit to New Order. Such are the pseudo-structuralist conveniences of an appropriation culture. Mesmerizing and strident, their synthesized beat and tapes are embellished by percussion, smashing glass and metal bashing against metal. Sinan, a Chinese female vocalist, completes the soundscape with her aloof, distant and cold presence. It's a powerfully hypnotic theme, a seductive dance-floor invocation.

But S.P.K. like to do more than threaten or stimulate—they like to assault. They like to manipulate, control and finally, attack, in the most stupid and savage of ways. Tonight Graeme Revell jumps off stage swinging a chain (a latent symbol of their S & M flirtations), and the crowd retreats. They leave a wide circle where someone has fallen over. Revell starts whipping him with the chain while he kicks back wildly, trying to escape.

Other people are hurt, amongst them a girl whose face is lacerated with welts. Confusion gives way and the show continues. Because S.P.K. are into power, and given a weapon and the authority of a stage, they show how much they like to exercise it. Violence becomes art, and we are merely the raw materials, disposable components in S.P.K.'s game of semantic discovery.

How brave, daring and imaginative! How shocking! How provocative! Too bad their exaltation of violence to the level of art, at other people's expense, is nothing more than a sick, middle-class indulgence by 'radical' artistes too far up their own confused, dead-end ideology to care. Too bad pain isn't some hypothesis you can toy with (though S.P.K. **clearly** love to), but a real, experienced thing that only a fascist would inflict on others in such a ritualised fashion. Too bad, too sick and too fucked for my taste, politics, sense of aesthetics and humanity.

The only thing I saw in S.P.K. was the gaping, ugly face of an enemy. In the context of their performance it was a well-above-average band going for shock value at the bottom line. To quote the title of one of their own songs, this was their 'Will To Power'. They weren't a metaphor for the violence, oppression and Fascism around us—they **were**.

Revell perceives himself and S.P.K. as 'extremely left wing', a supposed socialist who believes in 'getting the power of the right and shifting it over to the left'. Along with their actions, this doublespeak points to their reactionary centre, philosophically confused and utterly guilty in their complicity with right wing methodologies. Through the reflexive fashionability of always equating underground activity with political credibility, and accepting the terms by which it identifies itself, critical responses have limply accepted S.P.K.'s manifestos and statements without challenge, perpetuating their myth of radicalism and failing to question the duplicity and collusion with a dangerously reactionary atavism.

I'm reminded of the Bergman film *'The Serpent's Egg'*, where he focuses on incidents in Germany during the 1920s foreshadowing the rise of Nazism. Like the National Front, right-wing and racist graffiti, skinheads and the Queensland government, S.P.K. are a small and complex part of another serpent's egg, and I'm afraid for the heritage they presage.

\*Quotes from an interview with S.P.K. in *Stiletto Magazine* (Number 11)



# SPACED OUT SYDNEY

Contemporary Popular Music, Social Space and  
Young Unemployed People in Metropolitan Sydney

Drew Cottle

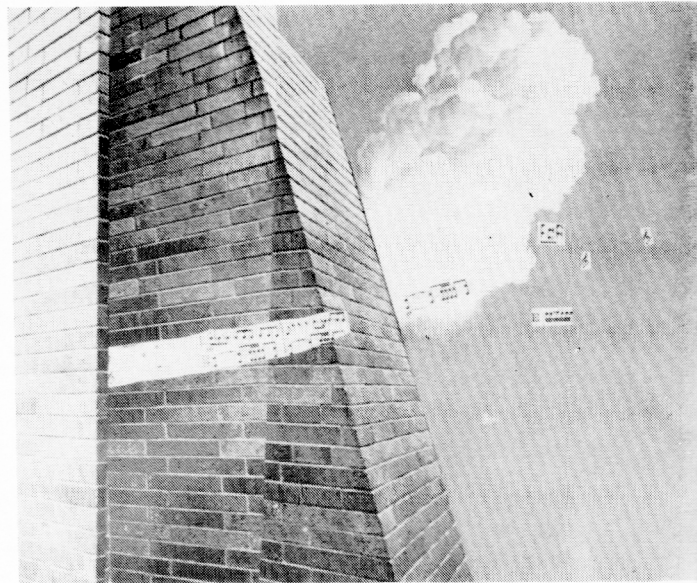
Recently, Peter Garrett of **Midnight Oil**, in explaining why the **Oils** declined to perform at Narara '83 Rock Festival, touched upon a subject too few contemporary rock bands, their managers, fans, and critics have rarely, if ever, considered: popular social space. Garrett explained, 'We were just disappointed that no agreement could be reached with the promoters regarding a scheme we had devised that would, hopefully, provide musical facilities for kids in the western suburbs (a scheme) which other bands were very sympathetic to...'. The **Oils** refusal to be on the stage at Narara might be seen as wilful or simply media hype and Garrett's commitment to the young out west can be cynically passed off as a rock star's tongue-in-cheek altruism. But such assumptions are patently false if one examines **Midnight Oil**'s longstanding involvement in broad political campaigns, be it opposition to the slaughter of seals and whales, or the struggle to keep Australian uranium in the ground.

The problem of the availability of a social space for popular contemporary music to be played and to be appreciated will remain and indeed grow as the metropolis of Sydney strives to become a mecca for international tourism, foreign merchant banking and the Australian headquarters of transnational corporations. But why is the link between popular music and its social space so crucial? And how should it be critically examined? And what is its significance in a city and its environs which is undergoing a rapid transformation as it simultaneously experiences a deepening depression with its attendant high levels of youth unemployment?

Contemporary popular music is played and heard where it can be; in the pubs, the clubs, the discos, on the beaches, in garages, at barbeques and at those fleeting rarities, open air rock concerts. These are its specific forms of social space. We might view it all, including the networked airwaves with their manufactured distortions of popular taste, the Top 40, the American Top 100, and 'the big cash prizes to be won if the mystery singer or song can be named', as a metropolitan expression of existential angst. Alienated labour listening to alienated, even alienating music. The Mysterons meet the punks, Oi!

Social space is not, in the parlance of those vendors of reality, 'an outstanding piece of prime real estate'. Social space denotes and demands a cultural context. Such a concept has no meaning in the lexicon of Sydney's neat-suited corporate power brokers. Music, if it at all enters such minds of property, is reduced to station changing of the radio during 'drive time', a seasonal ticket at the Opera House, records collected for fun and profit, or Muzak to watch others work by. The social space for contemporary popular music has a specific cultural context. Increasingly, each of these contexts are being eroded or eliminated as the city 'modernizes' into a metropolis made up of canyons and mountains of steel, concrete and glass.

The specific cultural context of contemporary music's social space is in the pubs and to a far lesser extent the clubs. The popular bands find their dedicated followers in the pubs and clubs. Often a mutual enthusiasm is generated between musicians and their audience. More importantly, these venues, these social spaces are areas of collective release from the anxieties, fears, and the humdrum monotony of life under monopoly capitalism. This specific social space for the city's unemployed and often disenfranchised young is of profound cultural importance. For it is in such a social space, such a cultural context, that their cultural opposition is generated and reproduced. Popular music, full of its contradictions of commercial banalities and sharp social comment, is a driving force in the culture of unemployed youth in a city up for grabs. Differing youthful subcultures distinguish themselves by their bands, their pubs, their music. The punks are an obvious example of this phenomenon as are certain tendencies within the women's movement with their frockrock gigs. And particular pubs out beyond Parramatta cater exclusively to the heavy metal headbangers. Contemporary popular music has its differing audien-



ces and various social spaces which have no place in the corporate plans for a showcase Sydney. This is not a consciously-contrived conspiracy undertaken by fiendish urban planners but essentially the ways in which the forces of capital have altered the urban topography of Sydney.

From the late nineteenth century until the early nineteen sixties, Sydney, despite its importance as a major *entrepot* for overseas trade, was little more than a big provincial city, an English Birmingham in the south west Pacific. It possessed no skyscrapers, a hybrid collection of public buildings exploding with High Victoriana and a serpentine growth of suburbs that would begin to conquer the Blue Mountains by the first years of the nineteen eighties. The relative affluence of the long boom, the mining bonanza of the nineteen sixties, and the subsequent decision to make Sydney both the financial heart of Australian capital instead of

Melbourne and the gateway for international tourism, provided the wherewithal for the city's major face-changing operation.

The 'Old Sydney' of labyrinthine arcades, three-storied city buildings and the proletarian slums of the Rocks, Paddington, and Woolloomooloo were either unceremoniously jack-hammered into rubble or somewhat belatedly declared historic sites or promptly purchased and renovated extensively. During each of these processes of 'urban redevelopment' the inner-city working class were exorted, bullied, and finally evicted onto the hot, flat, treeless plains of the western suburbs, sometimes into a Housing Commission dream home but usually not. The city, especially the hallowed Central Business District, was to become corporate property. The temples of Mammon streaked skywards. The laminated ugliness of international big-business logos glinted in the night sky above a heart of the city which was bereft of people by dusk, but still assiduously patrolled and guarded by armed private and public security forces. Corporate developers saw distinct commercial possibilities in this neon-lit, perfectly policed afterdark necropolis. Architecturally and

the periphery or, while it still existed, into the tin walls of the Stadium. The social space of the city's centre was made safe for the sounds fo corporate capital. 'No trespassing' along with 'God Save the Queen' became the dual national anthem, at least for the largest owners of urban property.

In the new physical space of the city, areas of 'beautification' were either reverentially preserved or created. The haunt of legal eagles, Queen's Square, was ridden of its trams and its hovels, to become an arid concrete delight. After decades of neglect, the Queen Victoria buildings in George Street is, at vast cost, to be 'restored'. The foreign real estate developer refuses to indicate what kinds of renovation will be carried out. The small businesses which currently are its rent-paying tenants realize that as soon as the foreign owner of this historic building evicts them they will become certain candidates for bankruptcy. Luna Park, after the tragic Ghost Train fire, was allowed to go to wrack and ruin. No effort was made by the State Labor government to purchase the site and convert it to a public amusement park. The 'hidden grasping hand' of the market was allowed to dictate. At a recent, poorly publicized



Peter Lyssiotis

socially the city had entered its Brutal Age. It was the 'best address for corporate brutes'. Big spending tourists and certain sections of the corporate elite would desire to live in the high security townhouses and gargantuan hotels of the urban core overlooking either the picturesque harbour by day or the bright silent streets by night. Property was sanctified in such a scenario, music an afterthought. It was either piped or observed at the best seats at the Opera House, or from the most expensive tables sited above the Hilton's imported floorshow. Out in the city streets the concrete sounds of a corporate symphony could be heard as Sydney's best examples of Art Deco, Art Nouveau, Edwardian and Victorian architecture were rapidly converted into mountains of broken brick by the demolition maestros. Popular music, during the early stages of the process to manufacture Sydney as an international showpiece, was forced underground, to

auktion, wealthy vandals were allowed to strip Luna Park of its rare collection of Art Deco curios and popular memorabilia at bargain basement prices. This 'Just for Fun' example of legal, wholesale theft has left the working people of Sydney with the present day Luna Park as little more than a shell of its former self. The people's fondest memories have become prized pieces in the private collections of the rich. Martin Place was similarly manicured. Its traffic colour and noise was replaced by a tiered concrete comatose zone for bored office workers replete with a musical shell from which only the most banal or anonymous sounds emanated. Popular music continued to be performed and appreciated but this was well away from the city's centre, at first in the tiny airtight clubs of Oxford Street and much later, when the voting and drinking age were reluctantly lowered, into the pubs. Now the existence of many inner-city pubs as venues of 'live' entertainment



is threatened as the grog monopolies, Tooheys and Toohs, begin to sell off many of their least profitable city hotels.

Certain cultural spaces for the performance and appreciation of music and the other performing arts were, of course, lavishly attended to. An Opera House—that cathedral of the bourgeoisie, according to Karl Marx—was finally built on the foreshores of Sydney Cove. Utzon's shell-shaped structure and its environs highlighted only the corporate concern for exclusion and privilege. Its walls had resounded to the melodic baritone of the late Paul Robeson during the middle stages of its construction, but building workers and other members of the working class saw the Opera House as just another landmark, another alien social space when Utzon's vision replaced the tramsheds at Bennelong Point. Other less prestigious cultural centres of the bourgeoisie have been erected in the city since the completion of the Opera House. The Seymour Centre near Sydney University and the former funeral parlours at Taylor Square, which houses that cultural cornucopia for the cynical bourgeoisie, Kinselas, are the two latest outstanding developments of this phenomenon. The city centre still remains deaf for popular music and deaf to the needs of more cultural space. The limits of the pub circuit and the limited number of clubs are seen as filling this demand. Meanwhile, the vast western suburbs remain devoid of accessible and popular social space.

Seemingly oblivious to these cultural necessities of Sydney's increasing unemployed youth, the business princes of the city with the connivance of the right wing Labor-controlled City of Sydney Council decided to perform another urban miracle on behalf of the well-being of their own kind. Only carefully intoned platitudes, a pre-stressed concrete, fully computerized Penrith police H.Q. and police 'spotter' helicopters were quickly delivered to ease the welfare and cultural demands of the jobless young in the west.

The corporate urban miracle was the yet-to-be completed Sydney Entertainment Centre. This cultural colossus of the very rich was to replace another city 'eyesore', Paddy's Market. In recent years, Paddy's Market in the midst of Sydney's Chinese quarter, has become not only the scene of a thriving market for the sale of vegetables, fruit and other wares, but also a social space for a growing number of street musicians. The Great Depression of the late nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties has given rise to the genesis of the buskers, not only at Paddy's Market, but also in many other areas in the city, particularly in its parks, subway stations and ferry terminals. The six million dollar man-made project down in the hollow of Chinatown is, when it is completed, to stand beside an artificial lake on which is to float a revolving Chinese restaurant. Such are the corporate dreams for San Fran Sydney! Its cultural or social space for its employed and unemployed people will be turned into areas of ephemeral spectacle, Macdonald's day/night pyjama cricket under the Packer beacons at the Sydney Cricket Ground, or a highly priced concert by some dollar-desperate or fading superstar at the Hordern Pavilion sauna. A social space of their own has been denied them in the peopleless concrete Fantasia of the corporate rich and their 'important overseas visitors' at the centre.

This is doubly so for those young Australians surviving in the sprawling suburbs without a job and without a future. However hedonistic, illusory and ultimately self-defeating, it is popular music which sustains them. Its symbolism, its mythology, its beat elementally defines their cultural resistance. To those without hope in Australia, the land of the wide brown hole for the foreign mining companies, music seems their only hope. Dancing and singing to the music with whatever drug coursing through your veins is a rational response for those who are condemned as social failures at school, are without work, and are increasingly

homeless. Popular social space is as culturally crucial to the unemployed young of Sydney's west as the maintenance of sacred sites is to all Black Australians.

The very lack of popular social space, or alternately, the denial of it together with widespread needs created by the present economic depression, can often erupt into momentary expressions of popular violence. A most pertinent example of popular violence was the incident at the Star Hotel in Newcastle. Although the struggle for the Star took place 100 miles from Circular Quay, it does illustrate the depth of popular feeling for the continuation of a social space where mainly the young unemployed in Newcastle could define themselves culturally, especially musically. The monopoly media and the police passed off the Star's popular defence as 'a wild drunken brawl precipitated by the imminent closure of a hotel with a sordid reputation.' The defensive street fighting and the overturning and burning of police cars by the young patrons of the Star indicates a deeply felt popular desire to keep the doors of the Star open for cultural reasons rather than the rumblings of any member's bar putsch. An abiding hatred and loathing of the police combined obviously with some heavy drinking, and the shameful loss of a popular social space for youth in the city wracked by high youth unemployment was the catalyst for the night of the Star. 'Cold Chisel' have immortalized the events of the Star in a song. Only cold authority remains deaf to the 'Cold Chisel' rock ballad.

Sydney's notorious Riot Squad characteristically had learnt rich lessons from Newcastle's night of the Star. When the fate of the Star Hotel befell the equally popular Stage Door Tavern of Sydney, the Riot Squad bristling with their Darth Vader suits kept the Stage Door faithful at bay, at least one hundred yards from the Tavern's entrance. Many paddy wagons waited in the wings to arrest and take away any of the Stage Door patrons who sought to emulate their brothers and sisters of the Star. A controlled display of force by the Riot Squad ensured that the Stage Door went the same way as the Star.

Perhaps the most spectacular example of popular discontent concerning Sydney's unemployed youth, their music, and their veritable lack of social space occurred outside the broad steps of the Sydney Opera House one balmy New Year's Eve several years ago. A vacuous evening of 'family entertainment' had been proceeding rather uncomfortably before the predominantly young, jobless and restive audience until the Lord Mayor, the Civic Reform apparatchik, Nelson Myers, bounded onto the rostrum. Beaming and booming with apparent bonhomie, the Lord Mayor urged the assembled to congratulate his efforts and those of the Sydney Gas Light Company to stage their wholesome slice of family entertainment unfettered by even one popular rock band.

The crowd erupted. Beer cans flew towards the smug and self-opinionated Lord Mayor well before he had time to announce the fireworks display. While rebellious Sydney youth had not shot the clocks as the Parisian *sans culottes* had done during the French Revolution as a symbolic collective act against their oppression, they did take action against a symbol of their distrust who was foisting unwanted saccharine musical forms upon them in an alien social space. Myers, Mary Poppins and the Opera House were the popular targets in the vast Opera House carpark as the boisterous revellers brought in the New Year. The next morning, the Sydney Morning Herald moaned about the beggars' banquet outside its Opera House. For once the recipients of royal gongs had to share the front page with drunken, unemployed youths in search of cultural release.

These spontaneous outbursts of popular dissent have predictably only led the city's corporate fathers and their willing minions on that well trod path of more police surveillance, protection, and the floating of draconian laws concerning popular street assemblies.

A social space, cultural centres for unemployed youth as a desperate mass need, did not pass as a thought in these powerful bureaucratic brains. Such ordered minds think that popular music should be confined to video variations and canned audiences of Countdown and that the rebellious young should be imprisoned in remand centres.

The immediate building of a significant number of rock arenas throughout the western suburbs was the furthest thing in such neat and atonal heads. Indeed, their unconscious response to this dire need was to close down many of the smaller clubs and dancehalls in the inner city on the ruse that they were 'firetraps'. This mass closure of the too few venues for popular music was the contradictory result of the occasional zeal of a handful of city aldermen to rid the metropolis of organized illegal gambling. The aldermanic campaign to smash the gambling dens was based on the technicality of a building's fireproofing. The campaign left in its wake flourishing illegal gambling houses and a dearth of suitable cultural spaces for popular music. Money, not music ruled the city as the police became suddenly blind.

And so the urban blues on cultural space for the unemployed young in the west goes on. A high school riot in Bidwell, an outlying western suburb, in October, 1981 brought the question of popular cultural spaces again into sharp focus. The State's response was immediate. A convoy of police cars prowled Bidwell's streets. One miniscule youth centre, with all the trappings of a remand centre, was hastily erected as 'the catchment area' for the many hundreds of unemployed young people in the district. A government investigation team scoured Bidwell and adjoining suburbs seeking opinions on the causes of the riot. The moral panics of the rich are shortlived, particularly if it is only a case of the poor trying to crack their own skulls. In downtown Sydney, the Bidwell experience, like the Star, the Stage Door and the Opera House battles for cultural space, soon passed.

Political evangelism quickly replaced official apathy out west. A Trotskyist grouping began to provide either a live band or mobile disco as forms of cultural release and identity to the legions of unemployed people living west of Paramatta. For a short time, the Trotskyist organization was successful in drawing scores of young people away from the pubs, the milk bars and the street corners. Heavy handed polemics and party membership drives with their attendant political demands on the unemployed young soon found the attendances at these youth dances-cum-political rallies rapidly decline. The Trotskyist organization clearly did not hear the music, it pressed on with Wesleyan fervour evangelizing to diminishing audiences.

On the last Saturday of February, 1983, the NSW Police Force took their form of organ grinding to the unemployed of Mt. Drutt. Scores of young people who were turned away from this Police Boy's Club dance, jived and sang in the streets, according to a Radio 2WS news report. The altruism of the police was proffered in an effort to curb the spate of youthful attacks on schools and the joyriding and burning of stolen cars in the Western Region. The young were lashing out at symbols of institutional authority they hate and status symbols they might never own.

The police hoped that their fortnightly discos would act as a safety valve for the pent up frustrations of the young who were permanently unemployed. The glaring need for young people to create and maintain their own social space free from the control and surveillance of the State and proselytizing political groups remains an unresolved and potentially explosive question. Music stands as a force of cultural opposition for unemployed working class youth in a social system that has failed them since birth.

Meanwhile, thirty odd miles away, in the dead heart of the city, youthful buskers sing and play for supplements to their dole cheque. Many of their tunes are

those picked from the radio, usually without a hint of rebellion in them. The buskers' social space yawns before them, out into the rubbish strewn streets beyond the portals of the Chevron Hilton, the Wentworth Hotel, Kings Cross railway station or the Wynyard tunnel. Copper and silver enter their collection boxes, hats and cases, occasionally dollar bills. Tourists often regard Sydney's street musicians as either local curiosities or on a level with vermin which can be seen rifling through the refuse left after a heavy day of retail trading on Sydney's streets. The buskers are ignored, rebuked, reviled and sometimes physically attacked. Charitable gestures towards them are becoming increasingly rare as the Depression deepens. The dog eat dog madness intensifies.

There is little effort on the part of the street troubadours to organize and defend their social space. Perhaps by bush telegraph they have learnt of the fate of the Adelaide Buskers. Busking is akin to begging for alms in Adelaide. Only during periods of 'high culture', such as the Adelaide Festival of Arts, were buskers given expensive permits to sing and play in the streets. A group of buskers who sang in the Rundle Mall without permits were the objects of police harassment. The street musicians sang popular political protests against racism, the mining of uranium and unemployment. Despite numerous arrests of this group by the police they continued to busk in the mall.

Finally, all busking, whatever the cultural occasion, was made unbendingly illegal. Three month gaol sentences awaited those street singing in Adelaide. A four-man squad of police on motorcycles cruised the mall to ensure the law was upheld. The attempts at organizing a buskers' protest group on the streets was always hampered by fear of the police. Street singing, taking music to the people, the creation of a popular social space was wiped out by the supreme majesty of the law in the city of churches, the paradise of dissent. Sydney buskers sing for their supper and keep a weather-eye out for the coppers. They share a grim realization that they too can be swept from the streets if that callous whim should so take the powerful and the privileged in any future manufactured campaign to clean up the city.

A social, a cultural space for the unemployed young and their musical culture in a metropolis which does not belong to them, is like the rumblings of an earthquake. Cracks and fissures have opened up in the urban space, but the very rich cling tenaciously to their property and fraudulent culture. With only music to maintain it, the west rumbles and shakes for a cultural space, for the self-activity of its unemployed young.

#### selected reading:

- W. Benjamin *Illuminations* NY 1969
- M. Castells *City, Class, and Power* NY 1978
- M. Coleman *Continuous Excursions* London 1982
- G. Debord *Society of the Spectacle* Detroit 1977
- S. Hall and T. Jefferson *Resistance through Rituals* London 1976
- F.J.B. Stilwell *Economic Crisis, Cities, and Regions* Sydney 1980

#### POSTSCRIPT: NARARA '84 OR GLENELG?

In the worsening economic depression, as corporate record sales decline dramatically, and venues for live popular music to be played and heard grow fewer (25 established places for popular music in Melbourne were closed during 1983), the video clip (leaving aside the question of its assumed aesthetics) has been used skilfully by the cultural managers of the ruling class. The keepers of the profit margins in the 'music industry' must always be assured of a 'reasonable' profit in any 'product' they may market. In the depressed contemporary popular music market, the video clip has been a gilt-edged godsend. It eliminates somewhat, the problems of 'testing' new products in a dwindling market. The industry is reduced by the depression to economies of scale. The promotion of 'unknowns' and

their tours of the wide, brown land has been drastically reduced or, in some cases, eliminated. 'Proven performers' like the multi-millionaire friends of South Africa, Elton John and Olivia Newton-John, or 'out-standing new acts' whose cultural novelty, such as Boy George and the Culture Club and Marilyn, are what the cultural corporations see as 'sensible investments'. The video disc, to use Herbert Marcuse's oft-quoted term, is a paramount expression of 'repressive tolerance'. Not only does the music become either thematically vacuous or little more than background wall-paper in most clips, but it also socially concentrates its largely youthful audience within the confined space of their or friends' living room watching T.V., that is, if they are fortunate enough to have a roof over their heads. The 'live' performance of bands becomes yet another dead video clip, memorable not for its music but the dexterity of its visual displays. The video, in turn, becomes an unquestionable arbiter of youth fashion. Punks, Boy George lookalikes and Rock-a-billy clones take up the standards and signs, both sacred and profane, of their video heroes. Whatever cultural radicalism the various groups on video may exude is quickly domesticated and mass-marketed. All kinds of visual fantasies are permitted in the current depression as long as they maintain unemployed young people in a position of political powerlessness.

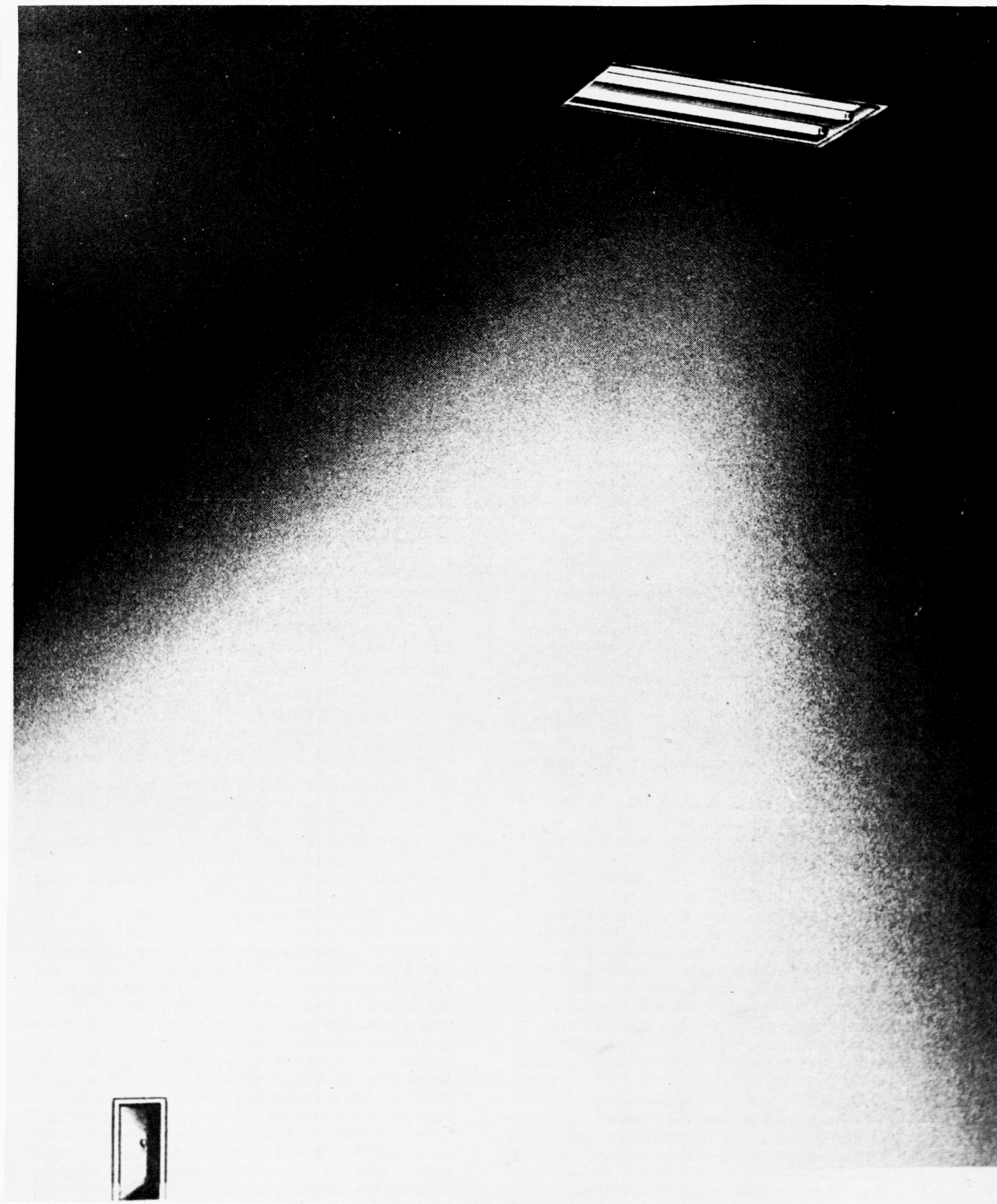
Long, sultry Sydney summers, the media monopolies' 'ratings wasteland', provide the opportunity for the cultural brahmins to contemplate musical circuses for the video-entranced masses. Narara '84 in New South Wales and the South Australian Glenelg Festival were the magnanimous offerings. The promoters of Narara '84, despite their claims of championing indigenous Australian popular music, in essence, saw their rock festival as a simple dollar-making exercise. Of equal importance was the way in which the social space of the festival reflected corporate planning designs. The authoritarian visions of off-shore corporate Sydney were transported to the scrublands of nearby Gosford. Narara '84 in certain cultural aspects represented a 'concentration camp' solution to the question of unemployed youth for the corporate rich. Consider Eugene Kogan's (a survivor of Buchenwald Concentration Camp) description of the political meaning of concentration camp sites, "As sites for concentration camps, the Nazis inevitably chose an inaccessible area, preferably forests and moors, not too far from larger cities. This served a dual purpose. The camps were isolated...yet the rest of the population were kept in a state of terror..." (from **The Theory and Practice of Hell**). Perhaps the parallel between the sites of rock festivals and those of concentration camps is too far-fetched. But it is 1984. Drastic solutions to the economic crisis have been voiced often and loud by influential members of the ruling class. And it is salient to remember who placed Fascist dictators at the head of capitalist states—the most powerful sectors of the ruling class. The extraordinary measures ruling circles will take up to maintain their privilege and wealth has been demonstrated throughout history. Nothing is beyond comprehension in 1984. The Narara solution therefore has its attractions to those concerned with the problem of permanently unemployed youth. A twelve-foot, cyclone-wire fence with its barbed wire topping skirted the perimeter of the Narara site. A small army of security personnel hired for their deadly prowess in karate, prowled endlessly about the site for any sign of rebellious behaviour. As in the metropolis, the rich and famous and their fawning acolytes were permanently segregated by armed guards from the mere fee-paying mortals. The performers and their entourage were housed in luxurious air-conditioned caravans if they were not helicoptered in and out. The fans were expected to cope as best they could with the heat, the flies and, on the final day of the festival, torrential rain in their makeshift canvas and cardboard eating and sleeping quarters. Their toilets were merely

holes in the ground. Medical facilities were at a bare minimum. And drugs of all kinds were at a supreme maximum. Popular space was explicitly defined by the corporate entrepreneurs at Narara. Free expression was determined by what the unarmed goon-squads of the Narara cogniscenti would tolerate. The bad-mouthed, dim-witted 'Austen Tayshus' could give vent to any verbal imbecility, but woe betide an ordinary camp dweller who dared to indulge in similar forms of 'outrageous' behaviour. They quickly became the target of the unpopular Narara police. A rigid concentration of popular expression was adhered to on the sandstone lowlands of Narara. Narara '84 bespoke of more than a rock festival. It was one sign of things to come.

Narara '84, for those without any means in the corporate Hawke kingdom, was cultural repression incarnate. In contrast, the happenings at seaside Glenelg were their symbols of resistance. The so-called 'Glenelg riot' was crucially linked to the depressed state of the South Australian economy. As South Australia's biggest employer, the foreign-owned motor vehicle industry in turn collapsed then rationalized to shed almost a third of its workforce, the restaurant liberals of Adelaide looked to both international and interstate tourism as the panacea for their economic ills. If the South Australian working class were to be Australia's white trash, they would at least be surrounded by the cultural shrines of the bourgeoisie and have the best table manners. South Australia was to be a place of cultural festivals, wandering tourists and hidden servants. The Barossa Valley with its wines and surviving German folkways fitted admirably into this 'tourism-led recovery'. Audacious plans to exploit the tourist potential of the beach resort of Glenelg were eagerly drawn up. Glenelg was to become the South Australian King's Cross and Surfers Paradise (minus the rolling surf). Pressure was placed on the many one-parent families, old age pensioners and young unemployed people living in rented Glenelg housing, to vacate their hoped-for tourist Eldorado. Strip clubs, prostitution, hard drug dealing and bent cops began to proliferate in breezy Glenelg. Harassment of the Glenelg poor intensified. A 'tourist industry' on the make required neither the presence nor the employment of unemployed kids, single mothers, or the elderly. An open-air rock festival in a park situated between two of Glenelg's oldest pubs became the scene of contending class forces: the poor and the guardians of private productive property, the South Australian constabulary. Social space in all of its manifold meanings was the trigger to the night when the Glenelg poor took their revenge. Those shameful ingredients—rock music and grog imbibed voraciously in unpatrolled spaces, the police later contended, gave the youthful rioters the daring and resolve to fight back. The pop sociologists of the kept press were quick to back up the 'considered judgements' of the police, adding other 'evil influences' such as 'crazy haircuts' and 'outlandish clothes'. The Jeremiahs of the pulpits included in their holy damnation of the young unemployed and their 'fiendish music', other related causes such as Sunday hotel trading, 'outside troublemakers' and too few police on the beat. Nowhere in these learned analyses was there a glimmer of understanding about the horrendous effects of prolonged unemployment, growing poverty, or the justifiable anger of those with the bleakest of futures in capitalist Australia. The social space needed by the poor and powerless was never at issue. Or if it was, it became an issue in logistics: that is, how many police were needed to bash the bejesus out of the spirited young if rock festivals get out of hand. The concentrated space of Narara is the recurring dream of the corporate cultural vendors; Glenelg is the nightmare which should never occur. All too well, the ruling class will learn the profound truth of the political maxim: where there is repression, there is resistance.

Drew Cottle





Peter Lyssiatis

Yes, We Have No WAGNIERS Today.



# PRETEXT ('Ding') - as PRELUDE

## Terrorist Anamnesis

Lang Baker

We have been sitting and listening to the prelude of **Parsifal**, or rather, we have been following the orders that adhere to a series of marks. These marks on a 'score' are, in fact, a transcription of the prelude of **Parsifal** to a series of marks that (conventionally) tell us, within quite broad parameters, where to put our fingers on the keyboard, and how long to keep them there. Of course there is the implicit requirement (the marks themselves require) that we recall a number of things (much as Parsifal may, or may not, have recalled the vision of his birth, that is, the law that was stained in spilling the chalice [see chorus]). This memory has been dubbed a certain 'feeling', 'ambience', 'spirit', 'passion', these making possible, as through a guiding light, the metaphorical shifts that lead our gaze from the marks on the page to the noisy recognition which is the inscription of the marks (actually different marks) on the tympanum in our ear-drum. This moment of physical inscription in the body is the very mark of a judgement, a propriety through which the property **Parsifal**—these very marks—so require(s) our attention. A judicial matter.

Pay attention!

Perhaps we have heard on a recording a fully orchestrated version of the prelude. Perhaps we have heard it played live in Bayreuth. Perhaps we have not even read what Nietzsche said about Cosima in a letter. It really doesn't matter. The 'propriety' of our hearing and our playing has already been decided, not simply because our ears have listened to Wagner (or rather inscribe the pretense of 'having heard' such and such), but because this system of physical propriety, this pretense, is our history.

Ours. Yours and mine. How?

Indeed this very word 'history', as that which denotes 'the past', the past 'proper', that which is in some way 'public property', is indistinguishable from the same mechanisms of propriety. Once we have decided that there must be history 'out there' we have already decided upon a 'propriety' and a 'property'. And then, well, our piano is out of tune. We are saddened by the fact that our repetition will deviate, will not be as close to Wagner as possible. We may not even trust our translator, or our dictionaries. We may change a note here and there to avoid the key that sticks.

We apologize to Richard Wagner. We apologize to our typanum. We apologize to our history. We apologize to our audience. You see, we love Richard Wagner and the state (the state of the art, the state and the art, et cetera)...

Play it again.

### Repetitiones Deutchlander

Wagner and his prelude is the state. The state is our history. Instead of Wagner we could substitute a number of signs—over-coded and over-coding signs—signs that will tell us each time to 'play it again and get it right this time':

Wagner—State  
Wagner—Prelude  
Wagner—Finale  
Wagner—History  
Wagner—A proper name  
Wagner—Return-the-ring (circular closure)  
Wagner—Signification  
Wagner—What does it mean?

We could write a dictionary, a very precise dictionary, called 'The Lexicon of Modern Human Usage: From Wagner to memory via Capital'. Capital slides between the gaps, the dashes and fissures, that separate us from Wagner. Put it in the stock market and it will go round and round, throwing off little bits of itself, little zones of repetition, little Wagner heads on one side with the state on the other. Put it in your pocket. Give it to a bum on the street. History is an infinite regress towards nothing—turn the coin over and you will recognize the prelude once again. Repetition: say it again, use it again—it is the same, but once recorded, proliferated, it will extract its surplus from the very gap between us and Wagner. Between the perfect piano and the out of tune one; between the transcription and the recording of Boulez's Bayreuth performance; between Wagner's ear-drum and the chalice; between Cosima and Nietzsche; between the pen in Richard's hand and the spear in Christ's side.

Play it again.

### How are we responsible to the state: Roman/ces

'Knowledge through pity: oh the innocent fool'.

The State says 'We are so close! Don't stop now'.

And of course we always stop and we feel sorry about the whole thing. The State feels sorry for us (and here is where the m/istake is usually made). The feeling of euphoria, of beauty, of the judgement 'that is good', does not mean anything at all if it does not add 'that mad/e me remember how it could have been', which is also 'remember how it was'. Adorno bought this error outright: 'Pleasure is social', he said, 'it is the return to that state prior to domination, social function, identity...'

What?

Parsifal—the return of the Grail, the return of the spea/r. History as sexist identity and exclusive duality—no, you could never really touch Wagner—but if you deceive us into dreaming that you have, then we might clap our hands and give you a grant...—'have a banana'—(Nietzsche paraphrase).

### Repetition squared, cubed, et cetera: nuclear memory

But this is what makes us love Wagner. In the end this is precisely what he is said to have said. Adorno did not recognize the implications of the fact that Wagner had already recorded this re-recording, this dream of return. At Bayreuth we dream the dream, we buy the illusion of illusion. In this sense Wagner is perfect for the piano—Shoenberg's dialectical piano—the contradictory piano. Adorno and Wagner, hand in hand, playing duets. Wagner the Marxist—National Socialism—despair and the leap of faith after we have exhausted every contradiction. Hegel's heaven and earth serialized, proliferated: atomic fascism—'yes, we have no bananas'.

Let's at least pretend to be honest. We love Wag/ner. It would be a lie to say that we did not. Why claim to be outside, why claim the Grail (which will just make you forget why you love Wagner), why pretend that we are not marked, that we are not slippery recording machines, romantic about our skips (skips that keep Wagner's B flat minor hanging above our skips, calling them by name). Wagner took the skips and recorded them within one theme—'History'—the theme we all want. The solution is not to say 'no' to Wagner, to claim the 'no'. The solution is to recognize **where he is**, how he got there, and how he works. In other words, we must remember that this Wagner is only Wagner by not being Wagner; each time he is over and over again. Not 'that's Wagner all right', but rather, 'that couldn't be Wagner—if there is one thing we are certain of, it is that it could not have been Wagner. He was here, but he could not **have been** her/e'.

### Stitches: Sewing up the 'what'

Wagner is all around us. Learn to use him by making him incapabl/e of living without desire. 'Wagner? I do not recall...'. Wagner must exhaust himself which means we must recognize that the artist must be exhausted, must be that which exhausts his act, exhausted by everything that is not the act, the proliferation of values that spin off the coin thrown out—gaps in ev/ery direction, complete repetition of the breach, the recorded breach; here ther/e is not possible claim of distance because it can no longer be a question of proximity, of closeness, of propriety. Wagner out of tune, Wagner comic books, Wagner interviewed in **Vogue Magazine**, Wagner on **The Johnny Carson Show**, 'Wagner Stew'—so many Wagners, Wagner now useless, a laughable image, Wagner's image shattering as the state apes his angry chord.

You aren't playing it again! Get it right!

But we are! (The State chokes.) We are playing it and very accurately. Here we give you the prelude of **Parsifal!** We have turned our ears into the surfaces of magnetic tape, here is what we heard. We play these tapes. We play it back.

Artists?

Tape machines.

This is the code?

It skips.

Wagner skips?

Wagner slips.

We love Wagner. The State will not get used to us saying this. No more pretense of 'non-fascism' by the State. We love the State too. We will tell them so. We will repeat exactly what we have been ordained to repeat, the very marks that have decided our love. But no longer smoothed over, no longer desiring and anticipating the juridical recording machine, responding with its surplus of value marks, patting us on the shoulder saying 'good try, I thought you had it that time. For a moment history passed before my eyes.' Here is our distorted surface, the sound of our marked bodies, the magnetic tape, in a way uneraseable—but not history, not the 'prelude'. Rather, the surface that renders the prelude everything it could never have been in the first place.

Yes, a memory of a sort. But improper, out of tune, skipping. The best, perfect speaker—the very grain of its construction as the micro-gaps in anamnesis. The proliferation of escape. Ever present. History as the body, never the image.

# Asbestos assertions unbelievable

SIR: I note with some surprise the stress placed by the James Hardie chairman, Mr John Reid, on keeping his workforce fully informed (*Herald*, May 12).

I am surprised because for more than a quarter of a century James Hardie failed to notify its predominantly black workforce at its Baryulgil asbestos mine of the very real dangers of asbestos.

This was despite the fact that the company knew, at the highest levels, that the mine was being operated unsafely.

Between 1970 and 1976, when Hardie sold the mine, the company's own monitoring program showed that dust levels in the mine and mill were, on average, almost five times the then recommended safe level.

The company has claimed that dust levels were normally kept within the recommended safe level of four asbestos fibres per cubic centimetre of air.

Yet secret internal company documents, tabled by the Aboriginal Legal Service before the parliamentary inquiry into Baryulgil, show that the average between 1970 and 1976 was 19.05 fibres, and at times ranged as high as 1,920 fibres — almost 500 times the recommended level.

It should be added, however, that not even the four-fibre level can really be considered harmless. In NSW, the regulation limit is now two and, according to the Minister for Industrial Relations, Mr Hills, is shortly to be reduced to one.

Earlier this year, the US Government reduced the level to 0.5.

While the confidential company documents — which your paper published last December — show the company was well aware of the unsafe conditions, evidence given to the parliamentary inquiry indicates that little or no effort was made to let the workers and their families know of the dangers.

As a result, many people in the Aboriginal communities around Baryulgil are now suffering the tragic effects of exposure to asbestos — lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis.

It is difficult not to believe that the cavalier attitude taken by the company to informing the Baryulgil workers was influenced by the fact that most were Aborigines.

While no asbestos mine can be considered safe, the Hardie documents show that dust levels at Baryulgil were significantly higher than in any other of the company's mines.

Asbestos may kill more slowly than poisoned flour, but for the Aboriginal people of Baryulgil, it is proving to be simply a 20th-century version of genocide.

Cecil Patten,  
Administrator,  
Aboriginal Legal Service,  
Cleveland and Abercrombie Streets,  
May 16 Chippendale.

## MUSIC IN THE SERVICE OF DOMINATION

As the year of the bicentenary draws closer the level of government and corporate-sponsored publicity steadily increases. In the near future we can expect it all: scarves and ties, key rings and can-openers, cups and saucers bearing the blue and white logo of Australia's 200th Anniversary. The production of music will also have a special role to play.

Presented here is the first instalment of bicentenary music. The song's wistful title 'There's a Whole Lot Better To Come' sets the tone of the bicentenary. It is also the dream of the Hawke Government and corporate capitalism in Australia. 'There's a Whole Lot Better To Come' is written by John Flanagan, a member of Meridian Advertising Agency. Meridian is responsible for much of the advertising work for the bicentenary. Not surprisingly this songwriter ably presents the corporate view of Australia. Such control of the bicentenary is, of course, not limited to songs. Chairman of the Bicentenary Authority is John Reid, a member of the Royal Sydney Yacht Club, the Australia Club and Chairman of James Hardie Industries. Reid tells us that "we want to involve all Australians" in the bicentenary. No doubt non-participation will be seen as treasonous. He goes on to say that we've come a long way and we have a lot in which to take pride. Such sincerity from the head of a corporation which carries the responsibility of hundreds of Aboriginal people who died or are suffering from asbestosis after employment in Hardie's Baryulgil asbestos mine wears a little thin!

The people of Australia do have achievements in which to take pride, but we can be sure our 'leaders' will do their utmost to sanitize and manipulate the history of the people to suit their own ends. The bicentennial song by Flanagan makes this all too clear. It is easier enough to point to the idiocy of the words and music of 'There's a Whole Lot Better To Come'. What is probably more important though, is an analysis of the metaphors of control and exploitation which give an underlying structure of meaning to the song. The very real divisions of class, gender and race are committed to the void, yet almost subconsciously we are left with no doubt as to who is the dominant bearer of the title 'Australian'. No particular mention is made of any group in the lyrics. A non-specific **they** is constantly used. 'They came', 'they fought', 'they took', 'they found'. Then in the last verse there is the introduction as the **other**. 'The people who joined them from all round the world' and 'those who were here when they came'. A system of harmonious integration is pictured as the **other** (black Australia and post-war immigrants) mixes easily with **they** (anglo Australia). Yet simultaneously we are given the 'obvious' conclusion it was **they** (anglo Australia) who 'came, fought, took, built', that is, constructed Australia. Further more the language of construction is dominated by an implied masculinity—strength, power, the will to dominate.<sup>1</sup> The generosity of the songs conclusion, 'There's one thing in common that all of us share/We're Australians and proud of the name' is not based on an acknowledgement of equality. It is the generosity of power and domination. The name can be shared but the rights cannot.

The song is replete with images of struggle against the 'land' and the 'elements', the unknown obstacles of 'nature'. This theme has recently been popular in corporate advertising, such as Exxon's (Esso) search for oil in 'the footsteps of Bourke and Wills'. The image of the hostile environment has had a powerful position within the Australian tradition. As a metaphor of struggle it displaces the real historical battle by people for control over their own lives. In the hands of corporate

advertising the image of the uncontrolled land 'naturalizes' exploitation. Thus in Flanagan's song, rather than mention 'miners' which may bring forth memories of people and their lives from Eureka to Kemira, there is the line, 'They found wealth lying under the soil.' Like Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge all we need is a good map and a bag to put the money in, there's certainly no room or need for a working **class**. Similarly in place of the multinational control and sellout of Australia we are lead to believe that 'The land gave its promise of riches to come/Of its minerals, its coal and its oil'. The metaphor of 'nature' fulfills two functions: it eliminates the need for a class of people who work but don't get rich; it substitutes a struggle against the elements for historical struggle. Thus in the bicentennial song exploitation becomes reduced to the ambiguous 'there was still a great deal to be done.'

Ideology strives to make particular historical conditions appear as everlasting, unchanging, as that which simply **is**. Both the lyrics and the music of 'There's A Whole Lot Better To Come' rest on an obviousness, a transparency, a simplicity. The harmonies, rhythm, accompaniment, the images combine to form a product of 'innocence'. It is this very obviousness and innocence which serve to mystify the realities of domination and inequality.

The song begins with white noise tapped from a synthesizer.<sup>2</sup> Presumably this is meant to remind the listener of the ancient and stark bleakness of the continent before it became civilized. This is followed by two low filtered sine waves slightly out of tune with each other so that a 'beating' is achieved. This must be the token gestural reference to the aboriginal culture—the low sine tones evoking memories of a didgeridoo. Then bang, the song starts with the introduction of the steel string guitar almost telling the listener to forget what has just been heard because the song really begins here. The style of the song is referent to the reliable Australian folk ballad: a lone male voice with guitar accompaniment. Romantic, full of struggle and mateship. The style is in the grand tradition of other propaganda songs such as 'Up there Cazaly', Carlton and United Breweries commercials, and 'Amoco in my Machine'. This song knows the historical tradition it comes from. And listen to the voice, can you hear the struggle, will and determination? The tone of the voice is not just anybody strumming a guitar idly in a living room, but rather it is evocative of someone singing while ploughing the fields. It has activity about it. With each hard earned expulsion of air the singer is able to wrap a few lyrics around them. Gradually the song expands with the inclusion of a bass guitar and drum kit. It is building up, the ploughing changes into images of a grader. There is a force here, pushing on relentlessly. In the next verse simple and trite female backing vocals are added. They are pleasant, unobtrusive, unthreatening and of course maternal like a lullaby. Is this referent to that old saying: 'behind every great man is a woman'? The myth of solidarity achieved by repression. In verse five we hear the orchestra enter the momentum. Its entry occurs with the words: 'there are people who joined from all around the world'. Again the sound is unobtrusive and in compliance with the song's simple structure. 'Sure we welcome migrants, so long as they help the economy keep going and behave themselves. And don't all those different cultures add a spice of colour to our boring culture.' The addition of the orchestra manipulates the listener into emotional, patriotic solidarity. One wonders what would have been introduced into the arrangement if the song had another five verses: chain-saws perhaps, or TNT. The song is timeless in that it can be slotted into the market at any time because of its folk ballad references. Consequently, it is a safe bet, as it ignores the constantly changing dialogue between a fluctuating culture and the musical responses to that culture. It exists

outside of that discourse sitting safely in our dream-world of myth. Perhaps some Aboriginies might have a laugh upon hearing the synthesized white noise at the beginning of the song; isn't that what we are hearing: a lot of white noise?

The simple songs of an ad-man become the tools of historical amnesia. It is more than ironic that the celebration of a 200 year anniversary has become the excuse for obscuring our past. And music, along with other 'cultural activities' will take its place as part of this domination.

1. An original line in the song referring to a 'man's will to fight' was deleted after popular complaints.
2. Recording of song on NMATAPE 3.

**Chris Cunneen**

### **THERE'S A WHOLE LOT BETTER TO COME**

#### **Verse**

They came in their ships from their homes far away  
And they planted a flag in the sand.  
Though their numbers were small for the task that they faced  
They were going to be part of this land.

#### **Chorus**

And the land was as big as the sky up above,  
And the sheer size would frighten anyone.  
Though the struggle was hard as they first started out  
There was a whole lot better to come.

#### **Verse**

They crossed over mountains, and planted their crops,  
They fought fire and drought and the rain,  
And at times when it seemed that the land must have won  
They'd turn to and start over again.

#### **Chorus**

And the land was as big as the task that they faced,  
But they'd stick to their task till they won.  
They were building a nation though times were hard,  
There was a whole lot better to come.

#### **Verse**

A century turned and the world learnt their name  
And the land's reputation stood tall.  
It's not numbers that matter when you measure a land,  
It's the people who count after all.

#### **Chorus**

Now the land was as big as the people themselves,  
And they took pride in all that they'd done,  
But they were'nt finished yet in the task they'd been set,  
There was a whole lot better to come.

#### **Verse**

They turned towns into cities that lit the night sky,  
They found wealth lying under the soil,  
And the land gave its promise of riches to come,  
Of its minerals, its coal and its oil.

#### **Chorus**

And the land was as big as they sky up above,  
There was still a great deal to be done.  
As they built for the future the people were sure  
There was a whole lot better to come.

#### **Verse**

There are people who joined them from all around the world,  
There are those who were here when they came,  
And there's one thing in common that all of us share,  
We're Australians and proud of the name.

#### **Chorus**

And the land is as big as they sky up above,  
And the future's as bright as any sun.  
There's been a whole lot of good in the time that we've had,  
And there's a whole lot better to come.



# THE LOGIC O

Traditionally, seduction is thought of from two perspectives: the **theological** and the **libertine**. The first thinks of seduction as evil, and sees the seducer as corrupter and the seducee as the corrupted. The second looks at seduction as the expression of will in individuals who know how to make themselves masters or mistresses of others' wills. Clearly, the theologian condemns what the libertine exalts; where the former sees a diabolical pride, the latter sees a Promethean triumph of human capacities. But both of them define 'seduce' as the dictate of a subjective will grounded in deception, and 'the one seduced' as a more or less conscious acceptance of the will of the other. Thus the two perspectives are reducible to a single theory of seduction, according to which subjective desire imposes its own sovereignty by means of fraudulent manoeuvres. From this point of view, the seducer is the active protagonist and the seducee is the seducer's victim, half-conned and half-complicitous.

Totally different from this theological-libertine concept of seduction is the sophist idea of **apate**. This idea constitutes one of the pivots of the reflections of Gorgias of Leontini (c. 483 - 376 BC) and consists in freeing the victim of all blame and all sin. It considers seduction as an entry into a logic imposed first and foremost on the seducer, and dissolves the dimension of deception and fraud. What is derived from all this is a conception of seduction that is opposed to Western metaphysics, which is based as much on the condemnation uttered by Socrates and Plato *vis-a-vis* the sophists, as on the anathema expressed by Judaism with regard to idolatrous seduction.

## In Praise of Helena

In his 'In Praise of Helena', Gorgias rescues Paris's victim from the ill repute and censure of which she has been the object: whoever allows themselves to be seduced by words is never culpable—indeed, the person is even considered to be wiser (**dikaioteros**) than someone who does not let themselves be seduced, since the seduced person 'allows themselves to conquer by the pleasure of words the (part of) being that has not been deprived of its sensibility' (Plutarch, **De Gloria Atheniensium**). Only the person who is 'too destitute of wise experience' (**amethesteros**) cannot be seduced: to give into seduction implies, according to Gorgias, a special form of wisdom. For that reason, the blame hurled at the being who gets themselves seduced is unjust, since it only derives from lack of 'opinion' (**doxes amathia**). 'But "opinion" lacks certainty and is without foundation, and this is why, in the confusion of deviations which lack certainty and are without foundation, it ('opinion') rejects those who have recourse to it' (Gorgias, **Helena**), whereas seduction, **apate**, has all the necessity of the **logos**.

Thus, a **logic of seduction** exists, which imposes itself as much on the being who is seduced as on the seducer, who is in a totally independent and opposed dimension to their own subjective will—a dimension that is related to **Kairos**, to the 'occasion'. In consequence, the seducer's activity is in no way an affirmation of his or her subjective will—it is not the activation of a plot or conspiracy, of a project conceived in secrecy, but rather it is an **efficacious seduction**, a persuasion which is transformed by the bias of charm and fascination, in just those moments when it obeys the 'occasion'. The **Kairos** is not a criterion, it possesses no 'arrogance of positive right, no legal status'. It does not follow the law of identity, but rather opens up a framework of radical difference. The **Kairos** isn't the cosmic justice expressed in universal, absolute law, but rather the **epieikes**—adequate and appropriate for the particular moment and



# F SEDUCTION

Mario Perniola



so by definition different, consistently in a relationship of contradiction to itself. For this reason, the process of seduction implied limitless obedience to the logic of the **Kairos**, because it is only under this condition that utterance can become 'a powerful sovereign who, with miniscule body and entirely invisible, leads the way to an array of profoundly godly works'. (To seduce is not to impose oneself—to seduce implies, on the contrary, a complete **ascesis** [asceticism] which can make someone 'speak or be silent, do or not do what they at the moment wanted to do'.) Thus, seduction is a union between reason (**gnome**) and force (**rome**), 'so as to make decisions using the latter to obtain a practical result with the former'. In the concept of seduction, practical success is implicit; success does not successively follow on from the logical moment, as in the realization of a project: the 'occasion' is precisely the coincidence between the **logos** and reality. This is why Gorgias repeats what Pythagoras had already said: you have to be 'authoritarian with authoritarians, wise with the wise, intrepid with intrepid people, terrible in terrible situations'.

Far from being a superman or superwoman, or an irresistible personality, the seducer appears to us stripped of identity. This lack of identity presents multiple aspects. The seducer is above all **polutropos**, as Homer said of Ulysses: this adjective must not be understood as 'deceiver', but rather in its literal sense, as 'versatile', 'changing'. The seducer does not occupy a single place and has no identity, but rather, is different, disposed to occupy numerous places. Basically, he or she is **Person**. The situation in which the seducer is constrained to move is imposed by the occasion, by the **Kairos**: the concrete rules of the game are laid down by the one seduced; the only possibility for action is if the rules are accepted. The metaphysical and moral transformation of the world is not within the realm of possibility for the seducer: 'Nothing exists, even if there is an existence—this existence cannot be represented, and even if it can be represented, it cannot be communicated with any certainty or explained to others' (Sextus Empiricus, **Adversus mathematicos**). The condition of anyone who makes use of the discourse is that much more dramatic if he or she firmly believes they are acting truly, that they are the interpreters of a reality, that they know the remedy that works: in fact, as Thucydides notes, 'good advice, frankly expressed, is about as suspect as bad advice'. To work, the defence of the innocent demands as much **apate** as the defence of a guilty party: the truth of the facts in no way appears 'pure and straightforward' in the putting forth of the argument. The auto-defence that Gorgias has Palamedes pronounce in a dramatic way underlines the fact that the key to persuasion does not lie in the one who speaks, but in the one who listens. Palamedes could be perfectly innocent, but if the judges haven't been attentive to what he has been saying, or cannot remember any of it, he will be condemned. To seduce is not to prevaricate on others: it implies, on the contrary, a total subservience to the 'occasion'; as Gorgias says about Olympic contests, bantering around the terms obstinacy (**tolma**) and cleverness (**sofia**): 'obstinacy to confront danger, cleverness to know what is appropriate to do'.

All this implies the dissolution of the concepts of truth and illusion, of reality and appearance: these distinctions belong to metaphysics and have no significance in Gorgias' open perspective. For him, in effect, 'being is obscure if it does not coincide with appearance; appearance is inconsistent if it does not coincide with being' (Proclus, **In Hesiodi Opera**). Thus, Gorgias developed in the ancient world the possibility of an aesthetic of



seduction opposed to the Aristotelian aesthetic of imitation, which is complicit in occidental metaphysics.

### The Secret Name of Rome

If one passes from the sophist **apate** to the Latin **seductio**, the logic of seduction is enriched by several new articulations that confirm and develop Gorgias' opinions. The etymology of the word **seduco** confirms the conception of seduction as 'the annulment and **ascesis** of the seducer: in fact, the word does not derive from **sui-duco** (to 'draw oneself') but **sed-duco** (to 'draw to one side, to lead off, to separate, to divide') in conformity with the signification of the particle **sed**, which indicates separation and distance. The **seductio** would thus be an act whereby one lifts someone out of their context of origin, a **diversion** from the beaten track.

In the history of ancient Rome, the most surprising example of a politico-military seduction is linked to the spiritual ritual of the **evocatio**. Whereas the Semitic populations (Assyrians, Babylonians and Hebrews) fought simultaneously with their enemies and the enemies' gods, the Romans (like the Hittites) conceived the divinities of the enemy as separable from the cities and the populations to which they were linked. Whereas the Semites thought of war as something total, in which their own gods were equally implicated, the Romans reckoned that you could not conquer a city before you had **seduced** it, or more precisely, until you had evoked its tutelary divinity. So this enemy god was invited to abandon its residence and transfer to Rome, where it would receive, in exchange, the erection of a temple and the organization of a cult. The indispensable condition of success for the **evocatio** was that the city and the god had to be designated by their real names (Macrobius, **Saturnalia**).

This ritual, whose signification is at once military, political, cultural and religious, takes place in a perspective which is antagonistic to that of Western metaphysics, whose line is expressed, for example, by Moses: speaking to the enemies of Israel he gives notice of his vow to exterminate them, to make no concessions to them, to demolish their altars, break their **steles**, to cut down their sacred poles and burn their idols (Deuteronomy). So whereas the Hebrews vowed the destruction of those **foreign** to them, the Romans appropriated the foreign. According to the Roman **evocatio**, conquest is impossible without the assimilation of the enemy's spiritual and cultural patrimony, which must be an object of respect and cult; the defeat of the enemy is only possible on the condition that the enemy become separated from their cultural and religious roots, and that it should be deprived of its identity. Thus, it could enter into the logic of seduction which makes the relative and provisional character of all oppositions appear—the movement by which the enemy gets transformed into a friend and vice-versa, the **enantio dromia** whereby everything gets transformed into its contrary. The seducer-seducee relationship can in fact lead neither to a relationship of friendship, nor to one of unfriendliness—it is neither love nor hate, but rather a matter of the initiation of the seduced by the seducer, an initiation whose logic is imposed with the same rigour on the one as on the other.

The gods that are seduced lose none of their dignity: they do not come to Rome as prisoners, but of their own free will. The mute acquiescence of the statues of the gods was in effect considered as a condition of their removal to Rome, which had to be facilitated by young people. The construction of a temple, usually on the Aventine (an abrupt plateau overlooking the Tiber), guaranteed them an adequate installation.

The **evocatio** is the contrary of prevarication: Rome didn't carry their own gods into the enemy city, but it was rather the fact of their place within the city walls. Thus,

Rome established a relationship of seduction with the vanquished cities that was thereafter transmitted to the inhabitants of the cities—with the result that the citizenry gets a new land, the new centre of attraction for subjected peoples. Not a **Vaterland** (fatherland) resting on devotion, but a **Kinderland** (children's land), resting on seduction.

In the ritual of the **evocatio**, there is a second even more surprising aspect. In order to prevent Rome itself becoming the object of an **evocatio** on the part of enemy peoples, the Romans (in the writings of Macrobius) were keen to ensure that no one knew the god who protected the city of Rome and the Latin name of the same city. It follows that the logic of seduction constrained the Romans and Rome, from being deprived of either god or name: instead of putting themselves forward as subject, the subject can only be what it is on condition of being **person**, a pure, empty space occupied by the gods and names of the ones seduced.

Hegel shows that he has grasped perfectly this aspect of the Roman world, even though he criticizes it bitterly, when he writes of Rome, that exterior reality was thought to be something **different and secret**: 'The same exterior object is considered [by the Romans] under a double aspect, first as pure exteriority and second as containing within itself something interior, something sacred, which otherwise would not be visible at all.' It follows from this, that as far as the Romans are concerned, everything is simultaneously mysterious and double. This double aspect of exteriority is found to be, precisely the essential character of the **simulacrum**, which makes the distinction between appearance and reality disappear, to the profit of a third dimension which transcends them. The fact that the greatest political power in antiquity should have been based on the rigorously respected prohibition on knowing one's real name and one's real god (which is to say, the real sources of one's identity) made the whole Roman world into a simulation—but this simulation is beyond the distinction between truth and lies, it hides only a name and a god which do not exist, and with whom one can cheerfully dispense. The problematic of seduction thus reveals itself as being indissolubly linked to that of simulation.

### The French Theseus

The logic of seduction finds a new expression in the seventeenth century, notably through Balthasar Gracian's treatise, **El Heroe**. It isn't by chance that Gorgias has been considered the precursor of baroque taste, since he flaunted the concise nature of his own discourse, named the vultures of the 'living tombstones', and introduced poetic language into politics. Besides, everyone knows that the Roman world constituted a basic point of reference for Gracian.

The extreme indeterminacy of the qualities of the seducer is well evidenced by Gracian's considerations on the **despejo**, which consists of 'una cierta aiosidad, en una endecible gallardia, tanto en el decir como en el decer, hasta en el dicurir' (Gracian, **El Heroe**). The French translator of Gracian, the Jesuit Joseph de Conberville, the eighteenth-century author of a very free translation of **El Heroe**, translated the **despejo** by the phrase 'je ne sais quoi'. In the Spanish word, even more than in the French rendition, the absence of the seducer's identity is clearly indicated: his or her whole charm is in just that liberty, that emptiness, that opening, in that way of making way for the specifics of the occasion; for the determinations of the 'je ne sais quoi' depends on the impression that the idea makes on those the seducer seduces. For this reason, there are seducees who attribute so much majesty and grandeur to the seducer, so much grace and spark, so much sweetness and vivacity etc: 'Some people see the "je ne sais quoi" in places where others don't see it at all; and

furthermore it is one of seduction's properties that it doesn't hit everyone in the same way, but rather that it only hits us as conforming to a manner of which each of us is aware'. The seducer opens up an empty framework that everyone can fill with whatever they want, and this means a content dictated by the 'occasion', yet it is never confused with it, since the 'occasion' in itself counts less than one's capacity for seizing on it. Gracian attributes to Henri IV an 'heroico desembarazo'; for him, Henri IV is the 'French Theseus' who 'con el hilo del oro del despejo supo desligarse de tan enricado laberiuto'.

As far as Gracian is concerned, seduction is recognized as the essential condition for governing, an alternative to charisma, which implies an authority based on inherent leadership qualities—but also an alternative to consensus, which presupposes an ensemble of beliefs shared by the major part of the members of society; seduction is the auto-suppression of the identity of power and the simulated repetition of the identities of the ones who are seduced. The logic of seduction is at one with the process of derealization which invests the baroque world, in which everything became a symbol.

### The Stone Guest

In 1930, some years before the publication of Gracian's *El Heroe*, there appeared the play by Tirso de Molina called *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*, which was perhaps the most important of a number of works that, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, brought onto the scene the myth of Don Juan. If you compare Don Juan with Gracian's hero, the difference is huge: Tirso's Don Juan is a vulgar con-artist who gets where he wants to go by passing himself off as someone else, or by making promises of marriage which he will never keep. Successive Don Juan's, starting with Moliere's, took on a psychological opaqueness, totally foreign to the sophisticated-baroque problematic of

seduction—that is, when they didn't fall into the pure libertine dimension. Still, the work of Tirso de Molina makes a further important moment in the baroque problematic of seduction: but this has less to do with the figure of Don Juan than with his relationship to his enemy, Don Gonzalo de Villosa, the stone guest. The final part of the drama, the double invitation and the double banquet, which have generally been considered as an edifying and moralizing epilogue, in fact contains the deepest significance of the work. The real seducer is not Don Juan but the stone guest, the one who plays about on Don Juan's domain, accepts his invitation to dinner and, returning the invitation to him, ends by carrying him to his grave. The dramatic impact of this last part has to do entirely with this question: why Don Juan, who is so used to pathological lying, keeps the promise made to the ghost/simulacrum of the commander and faithfully attends the fatal dinner? Don Gonzalo also puts forth, as evidence, the paradox: 'I wasn't thinking that you would have taken an oath on it, you who make a fool of the entire world'. Why does Don Juan run to his own cruel fate—simply to keep a promise made to a statue? The explanation of this paradox has to be sought out in the Jesuitic-Baroque virtue, indifference. The stone guest is precisely an inaccessible model of indifference: 'He's a formidable man—says the servant of Don Juan—he is made of stone, and you are made of flesh'. The preceding successes of Don Juan only add up to being evidence of the final success of the stone guest: the seduction of the seducer. Don Juan's successes are obtained by deception: those of the stone guest rest, on the contrary, on the irresistible attraction that he exercises on Don Juan. Once again simulacra and seduction are linked. The logic of seduction imposes itself beyond all of the subjectivities.

*Traverses/18: La Strategie  
des Apparences: Seduction*

Translated by Noel Sanders

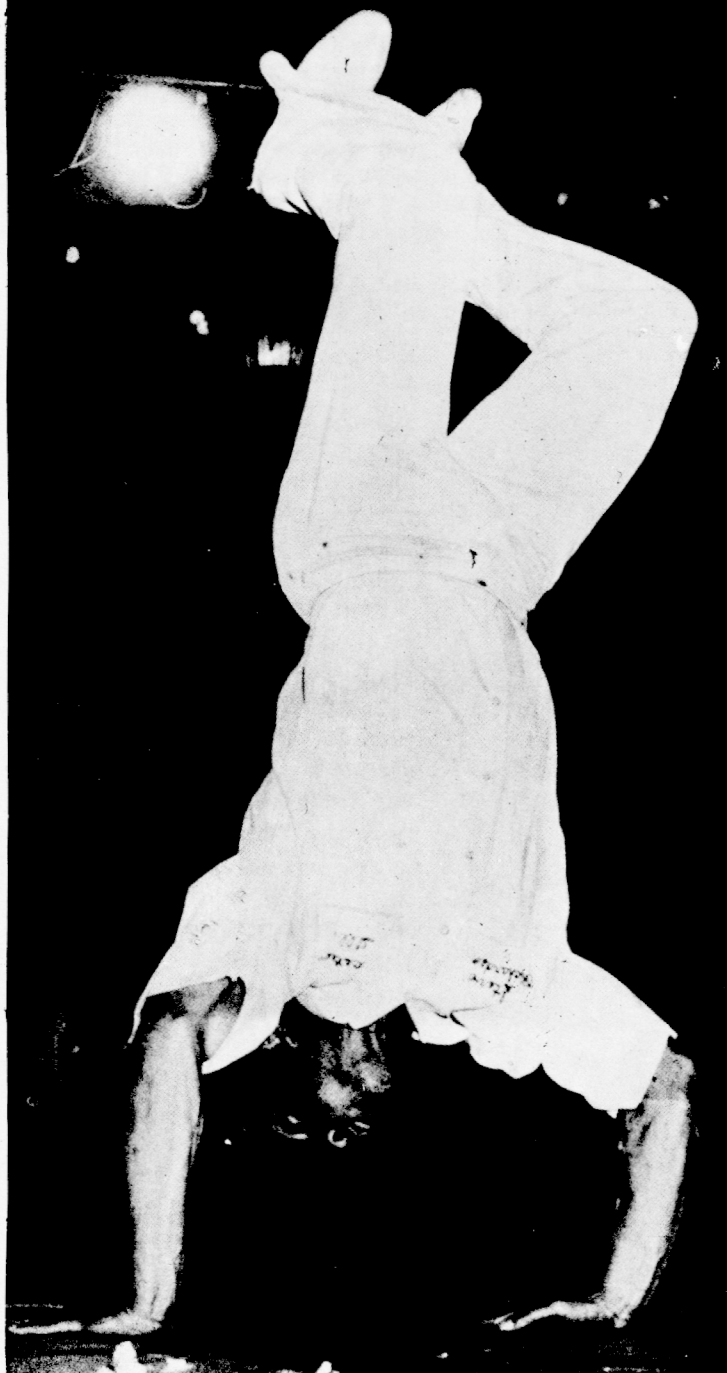




# THE KINGDOM OF THE TROPICS:

## A SMALL MYTHOLOGY OF DISCO

Patrick Mauries



1.

Recently an enigmatic formula has been appearing on the back of record sleeves, following the titles of the tracks, that reads 112 BPM, 220-214 BPM and so on. This, in fact, refers to the number of 'beats per minute'. Translated into movement, 220 BPM, for example, means 110 ARMs (the number of advances and returns per minute) which is to say—if it were possible—two advances and returns a second. None of the tracks seem however, to reach this superhuman limit and you can distinguish two major systems: the first clocks up 120 BPM (one AR a second), the second is everything that goes past such a threshold and goes at the speed of a 2-beat percussion pure and simple. Only a few dancers really follow the rhythm, but one can glimpse that the secret objective of disco is that it tries to create a saturation of space. It is as if the body, released from binary rhythm, from syncopated (and then cadenced) time, could become established in a 'time-warp' which it could occupy totally and master absolutely—and where it is possible to **cross** space with time.

Front-back, advance-return: each BPM makes the point: how not to be struck by the game with the cotton reel. Like Freud's grandson, the disco dancer captures and then throws something away, and like him too, dancers **fix** themselves on the rhythm and become one with it without anything being left out (and no doubt this is the primary reason why people adopt the habit of dancing on their own). This practice stifles the rhythmic space and can make it unbearable, but it fills it totally and the dancer is absorbed in it, which explains the unmistakably closed faces ('intransitive', as it were) that are part and parcel of the dominant attitude that consists of giving the impression that one dances out of boredom, because one is an expert and blase and thinking about something else—yet captured, despite oneself, by the general movement and by the show. From the balcony of the palace (disco), you can detach yourself from the spectacle and look at the bodies: they expose themselves, they slide, they bend, they thrust forward, they attack even as they back off. They drag themselves, but in a primary sense: they drain or repress something (the association leads to those mothers of emperors whose corpses used to get retrieved from the Tiber). The dredging action in the second sense is naturally reserved for other spaces, calmer and more dialectical, the off-beat territories: bars or other haunts. These deployed bodies, showing themselves off, extend themselves or retreat, they don't need a meeting, that is, 'something else', since ostensibly not happy with **having everything**, they **are** everything. The disco dancer knows no limit, recognizes no law; he has seduced what cannot be seduced, he is the phallus and can erect it in front of the person to whom he liberally makes a gift of it.

Moreover, why all this amazing noise, if not to blot out whatever menacing and persistent murmers ('that do not cease to assert themselves') that there might be? (The same goes for the other demonstrable levels of compulsion every Friday, Saturday, Sunday: all the moments when reality becomes silence, where work is suspended and external exigencies are lost to view.) Where, in the end, does disco come from? Not from a 'hypothetical French version', as one is led to believe, but from black music and gay night-spots, out of places that are much the same as one another.

2.

Record sleeves (mostly imports) are covered in a cellophane skin and they promote palm trees, black dancers, Californians and mythical images; a blueish light (sometimes artificial), slim bodies, sweaty, torn T-shirts, the sharp fingernails of a female dancer with perfect legs: a distanced eroticism, especially in its

violent aspects—a far-off landscape, that of the undivided.

The records are expensive, but the disco itself is accessible. Yet the disco has to coincide with the image of presentation: it makes an allusion to the tropical, to the richness of bodies and resources, by reference to past epochs which are considered to have been happy. The light lingers on, all deception is evacuated in this space without hierarchy: everything is understood via representation, undifferentiated by it, so that the night spot is pre-eminently the place of the 'mixed'.

3.

Without trying to make out that disco has the particular taste of the 'descent into hell', it is yet possible to make note of the knack that, while it doubles the music, it consists in 'producing' an undercurrent in noise, which is supposed to echo a real agitation, namely that which surrounds the making of the product (bursts of laughter, conversations, hesitations, exclamations, spoken confessions of faith and so on). Undoubtedly, it's all a direct descendant of the 'soul' music of the '60s, the 'Sam and Dave' style, which was already making wide use of this form of counterpoint. But this explanation doesn't get to the bottom of things. Disco and its immediate past share the same outlook: with their obsession with noise, they once again make you forget about work, literally by blotting it out; and as a natural consequence, this gives way to tribal sounds, evidence of a certain conviviality that is joyous and free. Disco, let us suppose, believes in that impossible object: a brotherhood and sisterhood without hate (as in the well-named 'Gary's gang' number **Do it again at the disco**).

4.

'One never judges things by what they are,  
but by what they mean to people.'

Saint Simon. X, CLXXXV

As strange as it may seem and as contradictory as it may appear to what has just been said, if there exists an historical formation to which disco corresponds in time, it is that of court society.<sup>1</sup> Like the court, the disco makes no distinction between public and private. The scene alone counts, reducing the private to the public in a small time-warp, from Saturday night to Sunday morning, diminishing space into the distance from the bar to the dance floor (the court would be a bit more particular on this point, that is to say the extension of space). In contrast with bourgeois 'concretization'—that cult of the tangible in which one opposes causative reality and the object as value, to the extravagance of conspicuous consumption and ostentatious luxury—the court and the disco are formalist: the substance of it matters little—the interest is only in appearances, the quality of presentation and 'making the scene'. To put it another way: the focus is on the way one body **reacts** against another, muting, seducing it, or indifferently rejecting it; the function of etiquette is thus concentrated, unless taken over by speed; the regulation of distances, necessary or not, is immediate. The infinite calculus of presuppositions and rewards contemplated by Saint Simon thus corresponds with the 'unconscious' definition (however recognized) of what is valorizing for the body of the dancer.

In fact, the parallel (between court and disco) has a common denominator: both agree on a necessity, they both recognize the same condition of being, in the existential meaning of the words. One **is**, in effect, only under the look of the other, that of the voyeur like that of the dancer, of the courtier like that of the flunky, constituted by each's particular mastery of the situation. And this is once again where the topography of the palace disco comes into it, extending to the slogan: 'Be Stars': sparkle in the eyes of the other.



There must be something in this grovelling' . . . humbling motions must have their reward . . . she struts back to check it out.



Now she's down, where the action is/was, while he is up there with the all right people, ready to plunge in the sword . . . who gets the ears?



She responds with a savage blow to the kidneys. Right on sister, is all this male trash deserves.



A nervous face, a forced style of dance, a clumsy greeting, et cetera, are thus the very things that give value to the subject in its entirety; when it happens, it takes on the greatest significance. A vital importance is everywhere attached to detachment and ostensible independence in the face of appreciation and judgement (which however shows that you **do** take account of these things, and to excess). To have the technique and know how to use it effortlessly at the same time, without attaching any 'importance' to the fact that this is what you are doing, is the big thing. This implacable law has its other side in that it is more flexible than that of the offer and the request, more subtle. Weakness can be as much use as strength in this regard, (this is the virtue of grace) since both depend on the parade and the moment. An essential difference is brought into play: whereas the image of the courtier's body refers to the signified (with favour and disfavour as indices of means, whether financial or political, profits or losses), disco extricates itself from all ambiguity of meaning. One puts at risk only a little bit of narcissistic prestige, one is no longer ruled by 'motivation by prestige' (from Elias) that heavily weights on courtiers. It is no longer a matter of **possessing** the other through the other's failure to resist—the other's shortcomings are put to good use; the game isn't to eliminate someone, but to cause a variation to come about, to lay ambush in some small way.

The look circulates: whoever looks is in turn looked at, each subject is also an object. The essential quality of the look is to be encircling—so much so as to make necessary one last comparison between court and disco,

namely **auto observation** (in La Bruyere's words, 'so that the favourites can observe themselves at the closest range...'). This is a form of sensibility, vigilant and lax at the same time, which permits one to elicit at close hand the look which could, much more quickly, be sizing you up. Whether the purpose is to 'ensnare' them or, on the contrary, put them off the idea, the overriding necessity is to know to align oneself with one's own rhythm, a proportion of movement, in a word: **to know how to keep a suitable body** (*savoir tenir le corps juste*).

Finally, to close off the analogy, just as the courtly space is totally oriented to the place of the king (literally so: annexes and wings point toward the central chamber of the first stage), so the disco space is vectorized, by the secret presence of a central personage, perhaps the queen, the 'White Queen', who, in her turn, takes in the scene with a single look.

5.

Everyone knows that a disco track exploits the power and erotic impact of the rhythm, not its strength. One is trapped by it, set in commotion, thrown onto the dance floor (as in the tale in which the horn player obliges his audience to drop everything and dance). But to this power another, just as strong, must be added: that of amnesia. It's not enough that a track should be strongly rhythmized—it must also be immediately identifiable: the pleasure of recognition is one of the **motivations** essential to the disco. Disco music is a music of afterthought, like an old catch-cry, although unlike a catch-cry it can only rarely be remembered and hummed.

6.

Disco as such is a theatre of ambivalences. Theatre is more and more what disco is becoming: a place reserved for masquerades and impossible costumes, brilliant outfits for **one** night out. This space of simulation is quite demanding: you must play the game here—a game which is that much more appreciable if it is forced (thus what one sees coming into being is a disco fashion which has nothing to do with either day or night wear: it is the mode of 'be stars').

Ambivalences: like everything that is based in the imaginary, disco surrenders you equally to the exaltation, both euphoric and savage, of the dance, to the limitless pleasure of artifice and to deflation of exhaustion that comes after. There are humiliating and depressing aberrations and deviations that more or less follow stereotypes in severity. The disco exposes you, for instance, to the tortures of making calculations, the unrelenting heartache of the circular arguments (I please someone/I don't please someone) and the infinite proliferation of what follows on from this (I think X likes me, I think that X thinks he/she likes me, I think that X thinks I like him/her, etc.) This high place of narcissism is also that of total defeat. The whole thing—a form of pleasure that is most twisted and also most exquisite, no doubt reserved for the very few—is to be able to maintain equilibrium.

7.

Considered over the long time scale, disco of course has no real existence; looked at in a short micro time-span, disco must be subject to evolution, composed of phases and traversed by mutations.

We can note moreover that disco poses a never-ending problem as far as history is concerned—a problem that every fashion poses, but accentuated in this case by its success—and that is, who will know in twenty years time how we will dance today? (We know how Mods or even Zazous danced, because they danced to rock, that is to say, a codified form, following a series of steps which are imposed and [hence] reconstructible; but the dance schemas, after being succeeded at speed V over 20 years—from the 'twist' to the 'madison', taking in the 'hully gully' and the 'mashed potato' along the way—have exploded and then totally disappeared, to the profit of free variation on a free and minimal schema.)





All this, therefore, threatens to disappear; but it is possible by following closely the subtle time spans that we were talking of, to sketch out a mock-up of how it might evolve. Disco would thus have a memory, a present and a past. The present conjuncture, a term for the transformation that determines through hindsight what constitutes a 'first', involves 'funky'; and the evolutionary curve would go neatly in the direction of the reified, in an image of the organism slowly devoured by entropy.

The 'funky' body (as it appears at the 'Bains-Douches' or the 'Main Bleue') is a dislocated, sucking, graceless (in the classical sense) body. 'Funky' has gone from a flowing movement which was asymptotic of good disco dancers, to a jerky movement: playing the automaton or the puppet, only the down-beat is observed, without linkage and slowly, in a sort of articulated violence, as one 'comes apart' (and also as one becomes infantilized: sucking one's thumb, putting on little airs, once again the evolutionary term is regressive...).

This frivolously ataxic body gives the impression of slow motion (the same impression that one gives in a state of exhaustion, when one seems to miss movements and get only a part of them) as if disco was at present making its destiny out of lassitude, and as if you were being excused for having had enough of it. (*Still* by James Brown, the father of 'funky': 'still' and 'quietly'.)

At the bottom of disco (its scarcely secret resiliency, as it were) lies a fascinating reductionist principle. Disco, like a sort of bourgeoisie, reads like an economy: a minimum of conventions for a maximum of adepts, a minimum of elaboration for a maximum of effects, a maximum of returns for minimal investment.

Thus the capacity of the disc has been adapted to the requirements of the dance by making ten minute LPs and eliminating superfluous tracks. The disc is consuming without remainder, (the artist, who works less, is like the customer, who only gets what he or she wants) everyone is more satisfied with what they could wish for. If it were necessary to talk about **routine** as far as disco is concerned, it would be mainly in the sense of information

content, since the phenomenon is also logical and economic, in the manner of a computer programme. And repetition, the major source of economy, is not, as some certain eager critics assure us, the pitfall of disco, but its glory, its foundation, its end and its means.

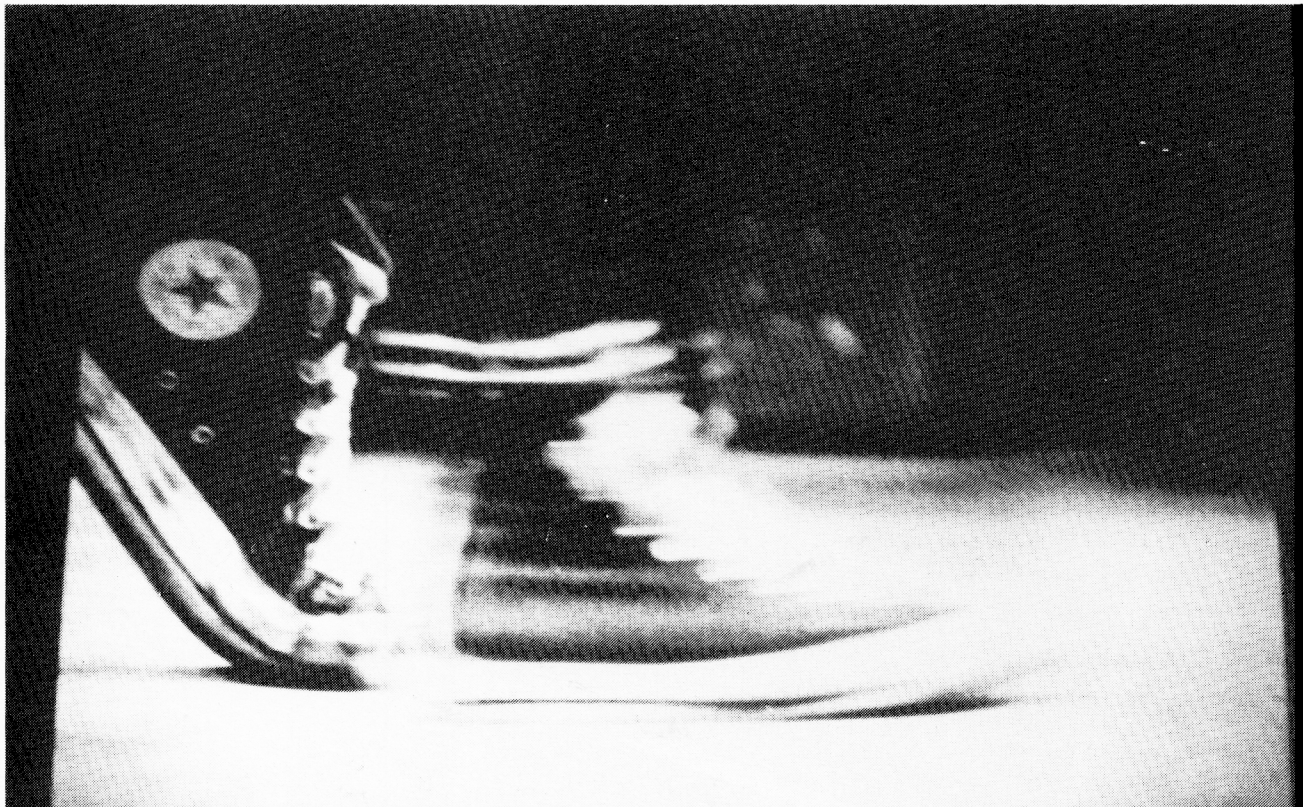
8.

What has contributed to the superiority and success of **Saturday Night Fever**? Not only the music, the actor's physique, the mirror image on which the hope of returns for effort is based, but also, and especially, the fact that what we are offered of the definitionless world is a **global** image: which takes in the background and the grotteness (the social) of the Saturday night spectacle, which present themselves for our adoration.

Thus the exhausted body of the Sunday morning (fatigue is no longer a paradox for us, being one of the charms and narcoses of disco), apparently naked, vulnerable as it is 'in the real world', makes the extension of waking hours, the state of being 'unstuck', the floating that is **intermediary** in the return to the real, all appealing. All this is also, in a certain way, just. And this justness makes the link: it ensures that all that is described is unique, but also common, shared, natural, and 'human', one of those fragmentary reflections around which a new romanticism congeals—a romanticism of the mass (that joyful loss, that limited dilapidation that despite everything in common property, is a limit that is difficult to reach). This romanticism already has a tradition, but whereas **On the Waterfront** gives us a tough (but still social) image of it, and **Lust for Life** an indecisive psychological version of it, **Saturday Night Fever** unveils its semi-lucid aspect of masquerade, rendered resilient to doubt and aspiring to answer it only by a surplus of comedy, in those arching bodies.

Traverses 18, Centre George Pompidou  
Translated by Noel Sanders

<sup>1</sup> Everything that follows about court society is derived from the reading that Norbert Eliagin has given in *La Societe de la Cour Paris*, Calman-Levy 1974.



### Tres Fache

- \* arrow — "hot hot hot" (chrysalis)
- \* orchestra jazira — "sakebo" (beggars banquet)
- \* willie colon — "abasadora" (phonofone)
- \* thomas mapfumo — "emma" (earthworks)
- \* mighty sparrow — "capitalism gone mad" (charlies)
- \* sunny ade — "eri okan" (sar)
- \* pat bossbone — "breakaway music" (orbitone)
- \* ebenezer obey — "ojeje" (virgin 12 inch)
- \* skatalites — "christine keeler" (studio one)
- \* swallow — "party in space" (charlies)
- \* eek-a-mouse — "terrorists in the city" (greensleeves)
- \* lee 'scratch' perry — "baffling smoke signal" (black ark)
- \* grand mixer dst — "crazy cuts" (island)
- \* yellow man — "sensemilla" (hawkeye)
- \* kanda bongo man — "djessy" (safari sound)

### ...To the dancehalls of Lagos

- \* pablo lubadika — "igalious" (cocorico)
- \* kosmos — "naleli congo" (safari ambience)
- \* fela anikulapo kuti — "perambulator" (lagos international)
- \* ebenezer obey — "singing for the people" (obey)
- \* four brothers — "makorokoto" (earthworks)
- \* bibi den — "the best ambience" (celluloid)
- \* sam mangwana — "vamos o para campo" (sam)
- \* bopol — "manuela" (skyllart)
- \* franco et rochereau — "lettre no 4" (choc)
- \* segun adewale — "yo pop" (sterns)
- \* lola lolita et fantastic tchico — "jeannot" (bir)
- \* pamelio mounk'a — "c'est la secretaire" (eddy'son)
- \* prince nico mbarga — "let them say" (polydor)
- \* bebe manga — "ami" (makossa)
- \* orchestra super mazembe — "samba" (virgin)

### On entre O.K. on sort K.O.

- \* baba brooks — "bank to bank part 1" (island)
- \* globe and whizzkid — "play the beat" (disconet)
- \* nyboma — "double double" (celluloid)
- \* nyboma — "urban dancefloor guerillas" (uncle)
- \* p-funk allstars — "la bombe tout choc" (sonog)
- \* zaiko langa langa — "time longer than rope" (bluebeat jam)
- \* prince buster — "where is my man" (record shack)
- \* eartha kitt — "ghetto dance" (greensleeves)
- \* michael palmer — "leroy" (sunburn)
- \* shortshirt — "dr mabuse" (ztt)
- \* propaganda — "water pumping" (tads)
- \* johnny osborne — "chance" (tommy boys)
- \* soul sonic force — "love explosion" (concord picante)
- \* tania maria — "road march jam" (orbitone)
- \* orbitone all stars — "wonko menko" (sterns)

compiled by Mark Plum

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## SYDNEY SATELLITE

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## DANCING OUT THE DEPRESSION: THE SYDNEY TROCADERO'S EARLIEST YEARS, 1936-1939

Drew Cottle

'The past is another country', the English novelist Hartley has poignantly informed us. In the present economic crisis historical nostalgia abounds and pilgrimages to the bourgeoisie's cultural shrines, the museums and the galleries, increase tenfold. By way of their cultural hegemony through the National Trust and other esteemed bodies, the ruling class attempt to ensure that the past and its artefacts will, if it is possible, be preserved or interpreted with pristine bourgeois thoroughness. That other country—the past—will remain safe, white and, hopefully, uncomplicated because of the absence of that vexatious question of class. But there are other ironies and contradictions in the nostalgic quest to preserve suitably bourgeois 'old buildings': Which buildings are to be reduced to rubble? How many are to be preserved? And what myths are to be engendered about those buildings which have been destroyed? Of course, the housing needs of the contemporary working class or the preservation of working class homes are never considered by the cultural mandarins. But that is another **class** question. How one approaches the social history of a 'lost' Art Deco marvel, Sydney's premier dance palais of the 1930s, **The Trocadero**, is therefore politically crucial. For it not only raises questions of historical interpretation but also demands that the primary function of the Trocadero as a vital centre of popular dancing be examined in the political context of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The site of the demolished Sydney Trocadero is now occupied by the misnamed, American-owned, Hoyts Cinema 'Complex' in George Street just down from the 'developer' threatened Regent Theatre. The Hoyts 'Complex' is misnamed because there is nothing at all 'complex' either architecturally or economically about its brutal concrete box-shape. It is 'a developer's' delight. It attempts to put as many bums as possible on seats before its silver screens. Its passive spectacles of visual popular-culture are aimed at simply securing the greatest profit maximization possible. How will the world-weary bourgeois assess this cultural shrine in ten, twenty or thirty years hence, assuming that the world avoids the threatened nuclear holocaust? Again, another **class** question. Before an examination of the Trocadero as a dancing centre can be carried out, it is necessary to speculate upon the primary social and political purpose behind the construction of the dance palais.

Simply, the desire of the owners of the Troc. to accrue profitable returns on their investment can be forwarded as an obvious answer. While this is demonstrably true, it avoids the question of the specific political and social context entirely. Answers to those questions can be found in the responses of Sydney's high bourgeoisie to the harrowing uncertainties of the Great Depression. The construction of the Trocadero began in 1935, the first year since 1930 that unemployment had fallen below 30 per cent in New South Wales. Wages (but not prices and profits) had been cut by between 10 per cent and 12 and a half per cent and remained frozen at the 1930 level. Jack Lang, the major political figure which the Sydney labour movement had looked to for inspiration in opposing wage cuts, mass sackings, evictions and price rises, had been dismissed from his job as Premier by a plot involving the most reactionary circles of NSW's ruling class and the imperial power brokers in London. While Lang had remained in office and railed against British imperialism's stranglehold on the State's economy, no capitalist in his right mind would have considered investing any amount in Lang's land of anarchy. Once Lang had been dismissed and a Tory government committed to 'Sane

Finance' was dutifully elected, money began once again to enter the Vampire City. Fortuitously for the pastoralists, the rich and most powerful sector of the State's capitalists, wheat and wool prices rose significantly in 1933. And Japanese militarism's undeclared war against China provided a booming market for the products of NSW's rural capital. Sydney and NSW, at least for the bourgeoisie, was well on the way to economic recovery by 1934, despite the huge army of the unemployed tramping through the city or the countryside, and the constant evictions, the hunger, the misery and the hopelessness of growing numbers of working-class people. Albeit briefly, this is the essential background and context to the construction of the Trocadero. British and local retail capital laid out 234,000 pounds sterling to build what was to become Sydney's finest dance-hall. There were no economic reservations. The price of labour was relatively cheap, the once powerful building unions now sorely depleted of financial members were unlikely to cause industrial trouble and, of equal importance, the construction of an ostentatious dance palais in the retailing heart of Sydney would act as a panacea to the drapery trade. Even people of very modest means would buy clothes to partake in what was arguably the most popular mass-activity for the young and middle-aged during the Depression years—social dancing.

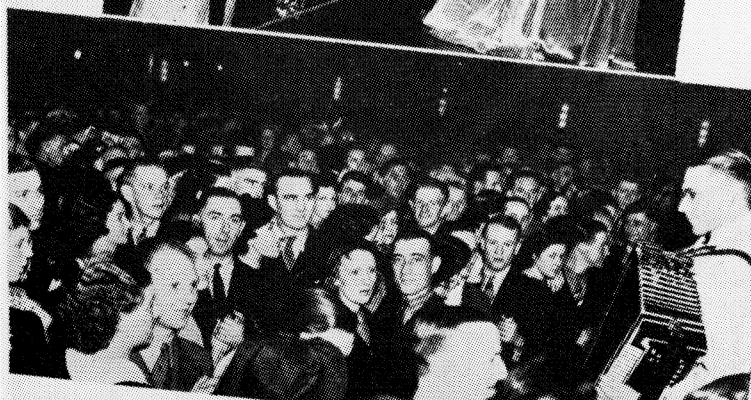
A modest suit or an evening dress plus the one shilling entrance fee could get working-class men and women into the shimmering plateglass interiors of the Troc. Except when the toffs had booked out the auditorium for their own private functions, the popular classes dressed in their best clothes would descend upon the Trocadero by tram, train, bicycle and motor-bike to dance the Depression away on every night apart from holy Sunday. Because most Australian social historians (like most intellectuals) have a reverence for the written or printed word, the text of, rather than the context of any social phenomenon becomes paramount. Social dancing in the Depression, probably the most popular mass-activity of the decade, because it has virtually no literary history, becomes the grand lacuna of their historical outpourings. One looks in vain for even the briefest description of the singular social activity which provided an existential meaning to the lives of the popular classes in the grimmest of times. Art historians too, have gravely ignored popular dancing in the interwar years, presumably because it was not a high bourgeois art form. Whatever the contemporary surveyors of what constitutes social history or aesthetics may pontificate upon, Sydney's working people invaded the Trocadero in its earliest years to foxtrot, samba, waltz, cha-cha and rhumba. Dancing's social significance cannot be underestimated. Future lovers, spouses and lifelong friendships were discovered on the vast, raised, highly-polished tallow-wood floors and the trestle tables of the Troc. The Art Deco filigree in the floor-to-ceiling glass walls, the modernist lighting, the revolving stage with its orchestra shell and the surging sea of dancing bodies transported the mainly working-class occupants of the Trocadero into glamorous temporary illusions and phantasies far from the hard realities of the Depression; but which, all knew, would end at the midnight hour. Some historians imbued with theories of social control might see the Trocadero as a suitable case for treatment. The Trocadero like the equally popular pictureshow, the social control theorists might argue, was a temple of bourgeois illusion. Appearances, however, are deceiving. While it is true that the cinema provided dominant role models and systems of belief and no news of the

# POPULAR NIGHT

TROCADERO



The craze for dancing has become an insatiable passion in the night life of Sydney. Here are some Saturday night scenes at the Trocadero. On these nights gather those to whom dancing is a serious occupation. The moment the band strikes up the floor is covered with couples in full flight. No idle chatter here, no courtship, no high jinks. Beauty of appearance and charm of personality take a back place. The dance is the thing and eternal shame for the partner who does not know his or her routine.



The HOME, June 1st, 1936.

unemployed in the newreels on its silver screen, a night out at the 'flicks' ensured that working people were not isolated from one another as a social class. Moreover, much that they saw on the silver screen was regarded as Hollywood 'mush', or as ways of living, which only the very rich, not them, could enjoy.

Social control theorists are remarkably bleak and at base anti-working class in their Orwellian conclusions. The masses for them must forever be at the barricades even when there are no barricades and no revolutionary situations. They should most certainly not be caught watching films or dancing the Pride of Erin!

The Art Deco facade and interior of the Trocadero can be translated as meaning confidence in the prevailing social system by the boss class. The Trocadero's architectural style with its modernist decorative patterns of rising suns, lightning zig zags and oscillating waves bespoke of the speed, power and the frenetic tempo of a modern metropolis which the cultural avant-garde of the bourgeoisie determined ailing Edwardian Sydney to be. Other commercial outlets, milk bars, office buildings, cinemas, hotels both before and during the worst Depression years had been fashioned in the Art Deco mould. Significantly, the Trocadero was the major Art Deco project begun and completed immediately after the blackest years of the Depression. It exuded bourgeois confidence in the future even as the city's leading sectors of capital flagrantly appeased Japanese militarism in the Far East as it made good business sense. The Trocadero may have symbolized the resilient survival of the rich as a class, though the strictures of the economic crisis rarely troubled them; its dancing belonged to the wage-slaves, the working class.

While Andrew Bissett, the author of **Black Roots, White Flowers**, an important study of Australian jazz, trumpets too loudly the virtuosity of the jazz musicians found in the Troc.'s orchestra shell, it is of more political relevance to examine the dance-band music in its specific social context. Indeed, several former dancers at the Troc. in its earliest years, thought the music, in retrospect, often inferior and too stylized, religiously aping American models. Bissett is looking for musical heroes in places where there are none. Frank Coughlan's Trocadero orchestra played passable white, swing big-band music. They earnestly churned out the syncopated tunes. 'A bracket of five was played, often three fast tunes and two slow ones followed by a break of ten minutes.' Bissett tells us nothing of this musical formulae. Importantly, Australian music big dance pavilions like the Troc. and Melbourne's Palais de Danse at St. Kilda, provided continuing employment for many musicians throughout the Depression. The music at the Troc., (despite its apparent glamour) and in less salubrious dives, was played by rote because that was how the various dance-hall managers demanded it. Such working conditions had traumatic consequences on the personal lives and relationships of the big-band musicians. Alcohol and other stimulants and depressants became their forms of release from the tedium of playing by rote. The jazz authority, Bissett, ignores this salient fact. Alcohol was crucial at the Troc., particularly for its dancers, in a city which after 6 p.m. became a 'dry' zone of temperance and bourgeois civility, or so the powers-that-be hoped. 'Six o'clock closing' of the city's innumerable pubs whose clientele were overwhelmingly working class had been forced through parliament as a civil law by ruling class 'wowsers' during the great anti-conscription struggles during the First Imperialist War. The pubs, as the ruling class knew only too well, were the meeting places for working men and women. That anti-social civic decision allowed the brewers to 'water down' their beer and push up their profits and led to the ugliest scenes in pubs as working class men brawled and bellowed for their beer before the pubs closed at 6 o'clock sharp. The bourgeoisie could get quietly drunk in their clubs and drawing rooms like 'gentlemen' whose personalities underwent remarkable changes as they politely



imbibed. Grog, despite the elaborate precautions of the watchful management, found its way into the Troc. It came in via the deep pockets of the gabardine overcoats, under armpits, under dresses, under hats and inside shirts. The pleasures of the dance were to be well lubricated, by both musician and dancer. And many a bouncer, much to the shame of the Trocadero's management, was to be found merrily drunk, a wanton victim of working-class blackmail. The alcohol, often spirits because of its potency, was 'drunk under the tables or behind people close to the glass wall so that the floor-walkers couldn't catch you'. High jinx fuelled by alcohol were entered into as the dancing drew closer to midnight. Practical jokes often backfired and became all-in brawls. Blood was not unknown to the Troc.'s tallow-wood floor. The sycopated dance tunes of the orchestra which were meant to designate the Taylorist time-and-motion studies set to the repetitive, harmonious rhythms of the perfect factory were fractured as grown men and women barn-danced to a cha-cha beat or sambaed the foxtrot. All the best laid musical plans could be ruined by the indigenous larrikin spirit. The feet of 'the hands' were not following orders even on the dance floor. Like most institutions and occasions of social significance, social dancing at the Trocadero became an often hidden but forever fluid class-contested terrain.

By open the Art Deco doors of the Trocadero to the working people as a means of profiting from a popular pastime, the capitalist class were continually confronted with the gnawing problem of making that defined social space an arena under the deadweight of their cultural hegemony. For such an area in a period of prolonged depression and with its dreamlike mirrored decor lent itself easily to the carnival spirit, the enthusiastic spontaneity of the oppressed. The movements of the imperialist-inspired dances could be loosened by alcohol and high spirits to be the prelude of a bacchanalia, a time of dread for the wealthy if allowed to take any organized form. The dances, in spite of their stylized, repetitive movements which were anchored to the notes of the syncopated predictable

rhythms of the music still denoted a certain air of freedom, a taboo, (particularly the Latin American dances 'civilized' by white American music), a cutting loose. The music and dancing in such a seemingly ritualistic confined space as the Trocadero dance-floor could become exceedingly 'dangerous'. The bourgeoisie of Sydney were able to contain this socially 'wild side' of the Trocadero until the early days of the American military invasion created by the exigencies of World War Two. A process of social levelling, more apparent than real, emerged during the People's War against fascism. The Black American GIs brought real jazz and blues to the White Australian shores. The Booker T. Washington Club in Darlinghurst allowed Australians and Americans, black and white and usually working class to listen and to dance to authentic Black American music. But it is another class story, particularly the apartheid attitudes adopted by the Australian ruling class and the American military leaders to the existence of and eventual closure of such an important musical venue. The Trocadero could no longer keep up its temperance facade in wartime Sydney. American money and influence saw to it that blackmarket grog was drunk above and no longer under the tables. The Sabbath was violated as the GIs taught the jitterbug and other daemonic dances to pleasure-seeking Australian audiences weary from work in factories or jungle fighting. This episode in the social history of dancing, of course strays beyond the bounds of the Troc.'s pre-war years, and into the earliest period of the corporate American take-over.

The past indeed may be another country and will remain so if its remaining relics, and more importantly, if its destroyed cultural venues like the Tivoli and in this instance, the Trocadero dance palais, are not investigated through the prism of social class, bourgeois domination and cultural resistance. One might be nostalgically forlorn over the cultural loss of the Trocadero's glassy Art Deco splendour, jackhammered and sold off as its remains were in the final years of the long post-war capitalist boom. But nostalgia for 'beautiful' things past can easily be compensated for by the lucrative trade in coffee-table books dealing in Art Deco memorabilia. 'Appearances' can conveniently be placed on the table or in a handy bookshelf. The reality of social dancing at the Troc. in the 1930s is something that should never be lost to that far-off country of nostalgia via the National Trust. For the dancing feet and the social drinking at the Troc. denoted some of the crucial social forms by which the Sydney working class, for better or worse, created their lively cultural traditions during the Great Depression. The dancers not the dance (to contradict a Yeatsian aphorism) need to be rigorously separated when dancing at the Trocadero is investigated. The proletarian dancers by their exuberant spirits proved to their 'betters' than they were down but not by any means out as they took to the Trocadero dancefloor

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#### INTERVIEWS:

- Tom Collins, Lola Parker, June Hallinan, Eve Crowley. All of these people had danced regularly at the Trocadero before the outbreak of World War Two.







# Lookin' For the Beat

richard vella

# **LOOKIN' FOR THE BEAT**

## **a music theatre work**

### **CHARACTERS**

**STORYTELLER** he is browsing through a bookcase. At times he comments on the action, steps into the action, or both.

**TRIO** a chorus of three men. They are not to have an identity individually but are to represent various aspects of the storyteller's desires. They also may comment on the action, step into the action, or both.

### **BEETHOVEN'S 'MOONLIGHT SONATA' (OP. 27 No.2)**

these are a set of variations based on the Beethoven sonata. They are either played live or on tape.

**DRUM MACHINE** a set of rhythmic variations based on certain rhythmic structures of the 'Moonlight Sonata'. The drum machine intervenes in the text acting as a master of ceremonies or a circus ring master.

### **THREE MEDIEVAL SONGS**

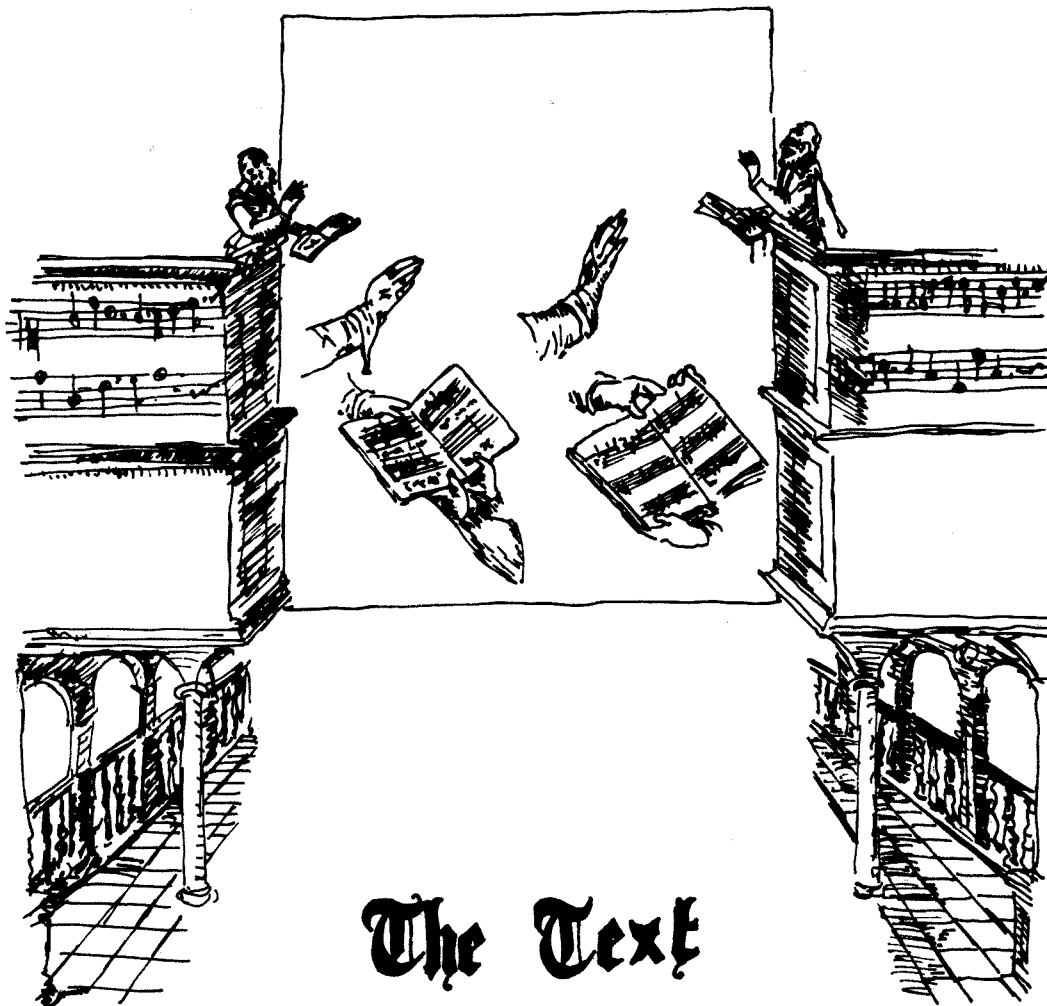
- I) 'my end is my beginning and my beginning is my end' (Machaut). This is to be played while the audience find their seats.
- II) 'thou shalt not play at the dice of thy fate' (anonymous).
- III) 'lady, you have promised me forever pleasure' (anonymous).

### **PROPS AND STAGING**

One piano, a bookcase of books, a red and black notebook, a record with a white label. The staging is to be an empty room with a bookcase.

### **RECORDED MUSIC ON CASSETTE (PC, SC)**

Recordings of the drum machine music, the Beethoven variations, and most of the Trio vocal sections are available on NMATAPE 3. **(PC)** and **(SC)** are to indicate when the reader of the text is to 'play cassette' and 'stop cassette' respectively. Each number in the text indicates a new scene change.



## The Text

- 1: (PC) **BEETHOVEN VARIATION NO. 1**  
**DRUM MACHINE MUSIC (SC)**
- 2: **STORYTELLER** The piano is a metaphor for a productive process that can subvert...the exploitation of desires...and patriarchy. No!...that can subvert patriarchy...and the exploitation of desires. Enter the piano!
- 3: (PC) **BEETHOVEN VARIATION NO. 2**  
  
*(PIANO WHEELED IN BY TRIO. TRIO THEN EXITS.)*  
**DRUM MACHINE MUSIC (SC)**
- 4: **STORYTELLER** But the story goes like this. After having moved living abodes and setting myself up in my friend's flat, I happened to stumble upon a library of books. And what a library! Books on poetry, politics, music, mythology...a biography on Antonin Artaud...you know...Antonin Artaud...the theatre of cruelty and all that stuff.  
  
(PC) **DRUM MACHINE MUSIC**  
  
*(AS DRUM MACHINE IS HEARD, THE STORYTELLER BEGINS TO SENSUOUSLY TOUCH HIMSELF) (SC)*
- 5: **STORYTELLER** While browsing among all these books I felt a certain sense of voyeurism creep through me. Even the clandestine. A bit like my childhood days and I am left alone at home. My parents have just gone out. All of a sudden the house changes identity into a deserted castle full of treasures and adventures.



(AFTER VARIATION IS ESTABLISHED, THE TRIO HUMS THE MEDIEVAL SONG "THOU SHALT NOT PLAY AT THE DICE OF THY FATE" OFF STAGE. AS SOON AS THIS IS ESTABLISHED, STORYTELLER CONTINUES)

**STORYTELLER**

Having loaded up with supplies from the castle kitchen I begin in the main chamber: my parents' bedroom. The unknown territory. Look! A chest of drawers...my mother's. I slowly open the top drawer. There are bright colours in it. Reds, greens, blues, whites. All sorts of colours. But I'm in a hurry. Open the next drawer. Lots of things here. Little plastic white boxes, flat round containers, gold and silver jewellery, a letter opener, metal cylinders inside which are concealed elegant-looking bullets of lipstick. It's very exciting...very secret.

(AS SOON AS STORYTELLER FINISHES SPEAKING, WORDS OF MEDIEVAL SONG ARE SUNG. THE BEETHOVEN VARIATION NO. 3 CONTINUES UNDERNEATH.)

'Thou shalt not play at the dice of thy fate  
but look beyond all the world's flimsy toys. See to it that  
thou doest remove all the moths that consume,  
that thou enjoy all the triumphs of life.  
Thus mayst thou walk to achieve this estate and to gain joy.  
Thou must persist in destroying the moths; thou must not fail.  
Firmly hold to this path, just as the saints did.'

**DRUM MACHINE (SC)**

7:

**STORYTELLER**

So we are back browsing through my friend's library. Back goes Antonin Artaud into his place on the shelf. There are books on psychiatry, linguistics, but wait...what's this?...A red and black notebook...it's a smart looking notebook. Should I open it? What if it contains my flatmate's innermost thoughts?...I open it quickly. It is empty. Full of soft lily white sheets of paper. It is a beautiful notebook. Each white page is lined with a red border. It feels so smooth. A thought...Seeing that I am going to be living here for a while, what if I keep this book for myself? For my own secret notes. To jot down those self acclaimed profound thoughts that I so often think I think. Having your own notebook to write in is a special type of relationship. It's like...you walk into a party and it's raging away. Lots of dancing and hugging. You see the most beautiful physical human being you have ever laid eyes on. Right out of a Hollywood movie. Enigmatic...sensuous...wistful. And you can feel all that adrenalin rush down to your groin.

(PC)

**TRIO**

well what's your desire  
your carrot on a string?

**STORYTELLER**

I like to touch myself when I'm in the bath

**TRIO**

well what's your desire  
your apple pie?

**STORYTELLER**

I like to hold my hands between my thighs  
Oh it's taking me higher and higher and Oh.

(SC)



9:

**STORYTELLER**

Red hair, green eyes, a light flimsy black summer shirt. But it's the expectation, the peeling off, the sudden ploys and manoeuvres, tactics, deals and negotiations. The secret covenants encapsulated within a single look or an ambiguous 'just between you and me' smile. A journey into the unknown. (HOLDING NOTEBOOK IN THE AIR.) ...The quest...But I thought we were talking about the piano being a metaphor for the abolition of competing desires. Enter the piano!

10: (PC) BEETHOVEN VARIATION NO. 4

(TRIO ENTERS AGAIN AND SHIFTS PIANO TO ANOTHER PLACE ON THE STAGE. TRIO REMAINS ON STAGE WHEN FINISHED.)

DRUM MACHINE MUSIC (SC)

11: STORYTELLER No! I shall not write just yet in my new found red and black notebook. I'll wait. Until that special poetic feeling comes. That feeling of creative expectation. It's really cosy being wrapped around this feeling. To feel my muscles flinch and slightly expand and contract in peaceful pleasure. It's similar to that feeling I get deep down inside when I am about to have a shit only I am lingering on that sensation of happy anticipation. I am not ready to go yet. I can wait a little more. It's nice. No need to push any harder. Ever so slowly I can feel my anus slightly pulsate in rhythmic accord with my new about-to-be-born turd. All working together in pleasure and solidarity. Yes, I can wait for that creative moment of spontaneous poetry. (PAUSE)

12: (PC) DRUM MACHINE

13: TRIO 'Lady, you have promised me forever pleasure when I should seek it of you.  
All my life I've been ready e'er to serve you and at your beck and call.  
Leave you I cannot I will not for it pains.  
Your promise will I receive it my desire which I fervently await, I would surely be content.' (SC)



STORYTELLER The quest for the holy grail! Arthur, Galahad, and the adventures of Percival in search of the lance. And the fisherman king, wounded by that very phallic but righteous lance...And our noble hero Percival, returning the lance to the invalid fisherman king, our symbol for castrated man. Ah Percival...what a story!

14: (PC)

STORYTELLER & TRIO I'm sick 'n tired of looking for a mother when  
all I wanna do is I just wanna fuck 'er!  
I'm sick 'n tired of actin' out the father when  
all I wanna do is to use 'n use my fucker! (SC)

15: STORYTELLER But the best part of the Percival myth is when he changes into his female counterpart. What a trumpcard! Masterstroke of bisexuality and androgeny combined. The sensual package of desire. But not for long. Percival messes it all up by turning back into his previous role. Ah Percival...sweet, naive, virginal Percival. Nobly in search of the lance...honour...responsibility...allegiance to the grail...searching for that big penis which will save the world from doom. Ah Percival...seduction's best story yet.

(PC)

TRIO 'Lady, you have promised....etc.'

16: DRUM MACHINE MUSIC  
BEETHOVEN VARIATION NO. 5  
DRUM MACHINE MUSIC (SC)

17: STORYTELLER I remember the very first Beethoven record I bought. It was a very long time ago. It was called 'Beethoven's Greatest Hits'. On the cover was a very austere face of Ludwig set in stone. Always looking up to the right hand side of the record, distantly. Around his head were flowers and birds. And there was a blue sky with clouds and a golden sun bursting through. Ever so preciously I would take the record out of its jacket and preciously slide the untarnished black disc from it's

soft protective sheaths, holding it between my fingertips in wonderment. To think that nobody else has laid a finger on it. Pure, virginal. This is the best part of listening to Beethoven. When the sound is only an image in my inner ear. Not even this recording is going to destroy that special feeling—so long as I can stop myself from playing it! But no, already I can feel myself motioning towards the record player holding reverently my new possession. I place it flat onto the turntable. It's smooth roundness lying open and vulnerable on the soft felt matting. The needle slowly and cautiously making its way into its strategic position. The white label simply saying 'Beethoven's Greatest Hits'. So elegant and yet wistful...yielding. A black bride with a pure white headband.

18:

(PC)

TRIO

well what's your desire  
your Turkish delight?

STORYTELLER

I like to fantasize of sensuous mouths.

TRIO

well what's your desire  
your bun in the oven?

STORYTELLER

I like to smell myself all over and over

TRIO

well what's your desire  
your own contradiction?

STORYTELLER

Oh, it's taking me higher and higher and Oh.

DRUM MACHINE MUSIC (SC)



19:

S/TELLER & TRIO

We are the Utopian state. Our body is composed of territories ruled by our great dictator, the phallus! No revolution is going to change things here. Not even that subversive one which that deviant finger started up. Why? Because we believe in our dictator. It is right!

STORYTELLER

The problem began when little finger refused to obey the orders relayed from our dictator.

TRIO

(USING THEIR FEET PLAY THE FOLLOWING RHYTHMS)



STORYTELLER

All of a sudden every single territory in our body shifted focus from our dictator onto little finger.

TRIO



STORYTELLER

And then all of another sudden, the other fingers began disobeying orders from our dictator.

TRIO



STORYTELLER

It was a dangerous affair indeed. Even thumb began disobeying orders.

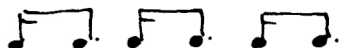
TRIO



STORYTELLER

What was to be done. Our whole left flank was now revolting against the right which also was beginning to show signs of mutiny.

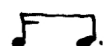
TRIO



STORYTELLER

It was a strange situation, left versus right, front versus back.

TRIO

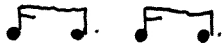


(in unison)


STORYTELLER

Our body was in civil war.

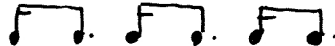


**TRIO**  (simile)


**STORYTELLER** But the dangerous part about it was that it wasn't violent. Quite the opposite. In fact it was very luring to join up with the left flank. They seemed so happy.

**TRIO** 


**STORYTELLER** But the few remaining loyal platoon leaders were quick off the mark and managed to convince us that we were being seduced.

**TRIO** 


**STORYTELLER** And then all of a sudden our grand dictator began spouting out orders profusely. It was a trumpcard. The masterstroke of authority.

**TRIO** 

**STORYTELLER** The revolting flanks immediately were suppressed and reprimanded.

**TRIO** 

**STORYTELLER** Those of us who remained loyal were given special praise and rewarded.

**TRIO** 

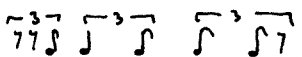
**STORYTELLER** It was another victory for our great dictator.

**20: (PC) BEETHOVEN VARIATION NO. 6  
DRUM MACHINE MUSIC (SC)**

**21: STORYTELLER** Did I ever tell you about what happened with Chum, my pet labrador?

**TRIO** No, what happened?

**STORYTELLER** Well as usual, I would come home and Chum would begin to jump up on me.

**TRIO** and then what happened?   
(rhythm: and then what happened)

**STORYTELLER** Sometimes he would lick my nose

**TRIO** and then what happened? ..... (simile)

**STORYTELLER** We would roll over on the ground hugging each other.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** I would sometimes give Chum a gentle headlock, and he would nudge me with his nose.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** I used to like him licking my ear.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** I'd make believe I'd go inside.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** Chum would start crying.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** I would wait until the last moment.

**TRIO** and then?

**STORYTELLER** I'd jump up in the air and give a victory yell.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** Chum would give a rapturous bark.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** We'd play around again for a while but then I would get tired of it and get up to go inside.

**STORYTELLER** Chum, realizing that I was going this time, gave a mournful cry.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** All of a sudden Chum leapt up on his back legs and wrapped his front legs around my leg.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** Chum started fucking my leg!

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** I tried to shake him off.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** He wouldn't let go.

**TRIO** and then?

**STORYTELLER** I shook harder.

**TRIO** and then?

**STORYTELLER** and harder.

**TRIO** and then?

**STORYTELLER** Down!

**TRIO** and then

**STORYTELLER** I punched.

**TRIO** and then?

**STORYTELLER** I kicked.

**TRIO** and then?

**STORYTELLER** Get off!

**TRIO** and then?

**STORYTELLER** Down!

**TRIO** and then?

**STORYTELLER** I slammed Chum against the wall.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** Chum gave a painful yelp and ran off.

**TRIO** and then what happened?

**STORYTELLER** I got rid of the dog.  
*(AT SOME POINT DURING THIS SECTION THE TRIO IS TO EXIT.)*



22: **STORYTELLER** What a story that was. A real spectacle although I'm not too sure whether I liked it at times. Really takes you along with it though... (PAUSE)

(PC) **TRIO**  
(OFF STAGE)  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
we're lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
the tit the bum the cock the tongue  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
the car the hat the eye the thumb  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat (SC)

**STORYTELLER** who are you?

**TRIO**  
we're lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
the anus the dress the toe the sun  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat

**STORYTELLER** where have you come from?

**TRIO**  
the suck the lick the cunt the dick  
lookin' for the beat



**STORYTELLER** how strange. They are like a machine spewing things out. Hey, where are you going?

**TRIO**  
the mouth the book the screw the finger  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
the view the sun the bed the thigh  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
the cup the watch the nipple the hair the look the fag  
lookin' for the beat  
the hand the pillow the fig the mate  
the dance the touch the shirt the bra  
the pear the wife the house the tit  
the nose the crotch the arse the smile  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat  
the mum the dad  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat

(THE STORYTELLER  
JOINS IN)

**STORYTELLER** Quite infectious after a while. It's like a bizarre mixed up chorus of operatic heroes all in the same scene. (PICKING UP OPERA SCORES FROM BOOKSHELF) Enter the chorus!

23: (PC) **BEETHOVEN VARIATION NO. 7**

(ENTER THE TRIO) (SC)

24: **STORYTELLER** These are my favourite male roles in opera. Don Juan, the incorrigible seducer. Othello, the patriarchal ruler. Parsifal, the searcher. And Wozzeck, the repressed. Poor old Wozzeck. The demented anti-hero who loses touch with his surroundings. Great plot though. Has all the right ingredients for a Hollywood movie. Wozzeck! A story of lust, power, obsession and seduction!

**TRIO** WOZZECK!



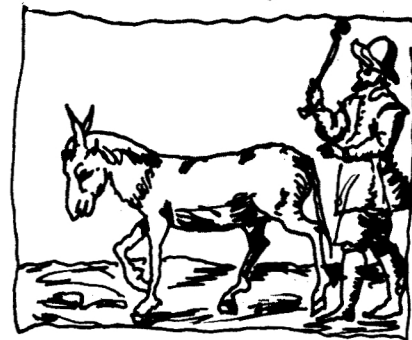
**STORYTELLER** A repressed man who didn't even know what he was repressing!

**TRIO** WOZZECK!

**STORYTELLER** Mr. Self-denial!

**TRIO** WOZZECK!

**STORYTELLER** The schizophrenic male, imprisoned by his own conditioning!



**TRIO** WOZZECK!

**STORYTELLER** The 20th century man-slave!...ah Wozzeck, what a story...any wonder he kills himself in the end. *(STORYTELLER ADDRESSES THE TRIO)* ...Hey Wozzeck, you must have known what was going on...And all that pressure you were under. Just pushing yourself harder and harder into a corner...I mean, where are you Wozzeck? Have you completely numbed yourself into oblivion? Switched onto automatic pilot?...You've got to tell me Wozzeck. Tell me. Tell me that it's not really you...I mean only a fool would desire a repressive role like that one!

**(PC)**

*(STORYTELLER FINDS HIS RED AND BLACK NOTEBOOK AND BEGINS TO WRITE, READING OUT ALOUD WHAT HE IS WRITING. AS THIS IS HAPPENING ONE MEMBER OF TRIO IS PLAYING PIANO. THE OTHER TWO ARE TO DO A NON-COMPETITIVE ACTIVITY. FOR EXAMPLE: USING THE BOOKS FROM THE BOOKSHELF THEY TOGETHER START TO BUILD A CONSTRUCTION WITH THEM.)*

#### **BEETHOVEN VARIATION NO. 8**

**STORYTELLER** I really like piano duets...It's so good to watch the players at work...I love to watch the hands roll over one another in perfect timing...Or joyously contradicting one another in different rhythms...Sometimes one would be the leader and the others would follow accordingly...Or at other times all would be playing an individual role yet at the same time supportive of one another...A playful sharing of roles...all with the common productive desire for the potential of the moment in spontaneous poetry.

**26:**

#### **DRUM MACHINE MUSIC**

**TRIO** we're lookin' for the beat *(THROWING BOOKS AT STORYTELLER)*  
 lookin' for the beat  
 an eye for an eye  
 a tit for a cock  
 a suck for a lick  
 a touch for a kiss  
 lookin' for the beat  
 lookin' for the beat

**STORYTELLER** Oh, Oh it's that machine again

**TRIO** an ear for a cunt  
 an arse for a tit  
 a ball for a nipple  
 lookin' for the beat  
 a suck for a kiss  
 a stroke for an arse  
 a thumb for a lip  
 lookin' for the beat  
 a pound of flesh  
 a tit for tat  
 a smile for a fuck  
 well what's your desire



(STORYTELLER JOINS IN)

your marketing price  
well what's your desire  
your marketing price  
lookin' for the beat  
lookin' for the beat (SC)

..... STORYTELLER

They make me feel like I'm in a stockmarket...or an auction. There are four of us left and the pressure's on. I've done pretty well so far having let the smaller ones fight it out among themselves. No need to waste my time with them. If they don't know how to play the game properly then that's their loss. Anyway after I've finished off these remaining few bidders I'll go up to all of them as I usually do, pat them on the back and be supportive and caring. But wait! These other three haven't dropped out yet. Not good. Push harder. Push harder. They're really going for it too. Push harder. Push harder. If I don't pull in some extra reserve now I'll lose out.

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER No!

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER Look! A hand.

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER I can't drop out now. Keep going.

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER That guy over there, he's slowing.

TRIO push harder

STORYTELLER Look, here's your chance.

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER He'll make some weakness soon.

TRIO push harder

STORYTELLER A sign?

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER Come on...

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER Go!

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER He's done it. He's down.

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER And he falls, and he falls, and he falls.

TRIO push harder

STORYTELLER There are still two more left. Who are they?

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER Can I do it again? I'm gonna have to bluff a bit.

TRIO push harder push harder

STORYTELLER look good look good

**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** Look good

**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** There!

**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** He's down.

**TRIO** push harder push harder

**STORYTELLER** Beat him.

**TRIO** push harder push harder

**STORYTELLER** One more to go and he's good.

**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** I'm weakening. Keep going.

**TRIO** push harder push harder

**STORYTELLER** What to do, what to do.

**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** He's still going.

**TRIO** push harder push harder

**STORYTELLER** No. It's too much.

**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** No!

**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** He's slipping.

**TRIO** push harder push harder

**STORYTELLER** Jump!

**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** Faster.

**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** Go!

**TRIO** push

**STORYTELLER** Down!

**TRIO** push

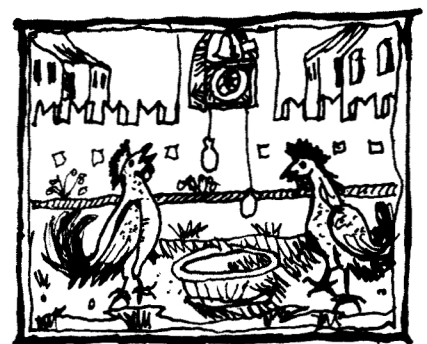
**STORYTELLER** Down!

**TRIO** harder

**STORYTELLER** Down!

**TRIO** harder

**STORYTELLER** Ahhhh...





**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** ...I've won.

**TRIO** push harder

**STORYTELLER** I've won it.

**27:** *(STORYTELLER RETURNS TO THE BOOKCASE. HE SHOULD BE EXHAUSTED FROM BEING INVOLVED IN THE COMPETITION. SLOWLY HE PICKS UP THE BOOKS WHICH WERE THROWN TO HIM FROM THE TRIO. HE FINDS ONE BOOK AND STOPS TO READ PARTS OF IT. HE COMES ACROSS A PHRASE WHICH HE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND. AT THE SAME TIME ONE MEMBER OF THE TRIO WALKS UP TO THE OTHER TWO WHO ARE TO SPEAK IN ENGLISH AND ITALIAN TOGETHER. THE IMPLICATION IS THAT THE STORYTELLER HAS FOUND A BOOK ON HOW TO SPEAK ITALIAN.)*

**TRIO (1,2,& 3)** **1** Repeat *(IN A SCHOOLTEACHER'S TONE)*  
**2** la mia sensualita e represso dalla mia sessualita et  
 (TOGETHER) la mia sessualita e represso dalla mia sensualita  
**3** my sensuality is repressed by my sexuality and  
 my sexuality is repressed by my sensuality

**1** Repeat

**2** la mia sensualita...etc.  
 (TOGETHER) **3** my sensuality...etc.  
**1** repeat...etc.

*(GRADUALLY THE TRIO SPEAKS SOFTER AND SOFTER. AFTER ABOUT THREE OR FOUR REPETITIONS THE STORYTELLER PICKS UP A RECORD FROM THE BOOKSHELF. HE BEGINS SPEAKING. THE TRIO CONTINUES UNDERNEATH.)*

**STORYTELLER** I guess what I like the most about the piano music of Beethoven is that they are all different. Each one contradicting the previous one before. Which is why they sound so fresh and vital. It is as if each one is demanding the right to be heard. Their joys, sorrows, tenderness, anger, desire, delights, sensitivities, pleasures. The thoughtful, happy anticipations and empathy. All beating together in solidarity and spontaneous poetry. The common desire to unfold. Discovering the unknown journey of non-repressive desires. When anybody asks do I like Beethoven, I reply, "yes, I have liked every single Beethoven I have met".

**28:** (PC) **DRUM MACHINE MUSIC** (SC)

**29:** **STORYTELLER** But the story goes like this. Having lived in my new apartment for about 6 months, I was playing the piano one day when my flatmate said, "your piano's out of tune". And I said:

**TRIO (1,2,& 3)** *(ANSWER INDIVIDUALLY ON BEHALF OF STORYTELLER)*  
**1** No it's not

**STORYTELLER** My flatmate says, "it is, can't you hear it?". I say:

**2** No, you are wrong.

**STORYTELLER** My flatmate then says, "why don't you hire a tuner, they don't cost too much". I say:

**3** It doesn't need one.

**STORYTELLER** My flatmate then says, "well you're out of tune then". And I say:

**1** Well maybe I like playing with these sounds.

**STORYTELLER** By this time I have realized that my piano is out of tune but I can't give in now. I mean, my flatmate doesn't even play the piano. I say:

2 Anyway, I can tune it myself if I want to.

**STORYTELLER** This is not true. I don't even know anything about piano tuning. If I did I wouldn't have got myself into this mess. My flatmate then said, "well why don't you tune it then?" And I say:

3 When I'm ready, besides I don't have the equipment now.

**STORYTELLER** "So you do admit that it's out of tune!" my flatmate said. I say:

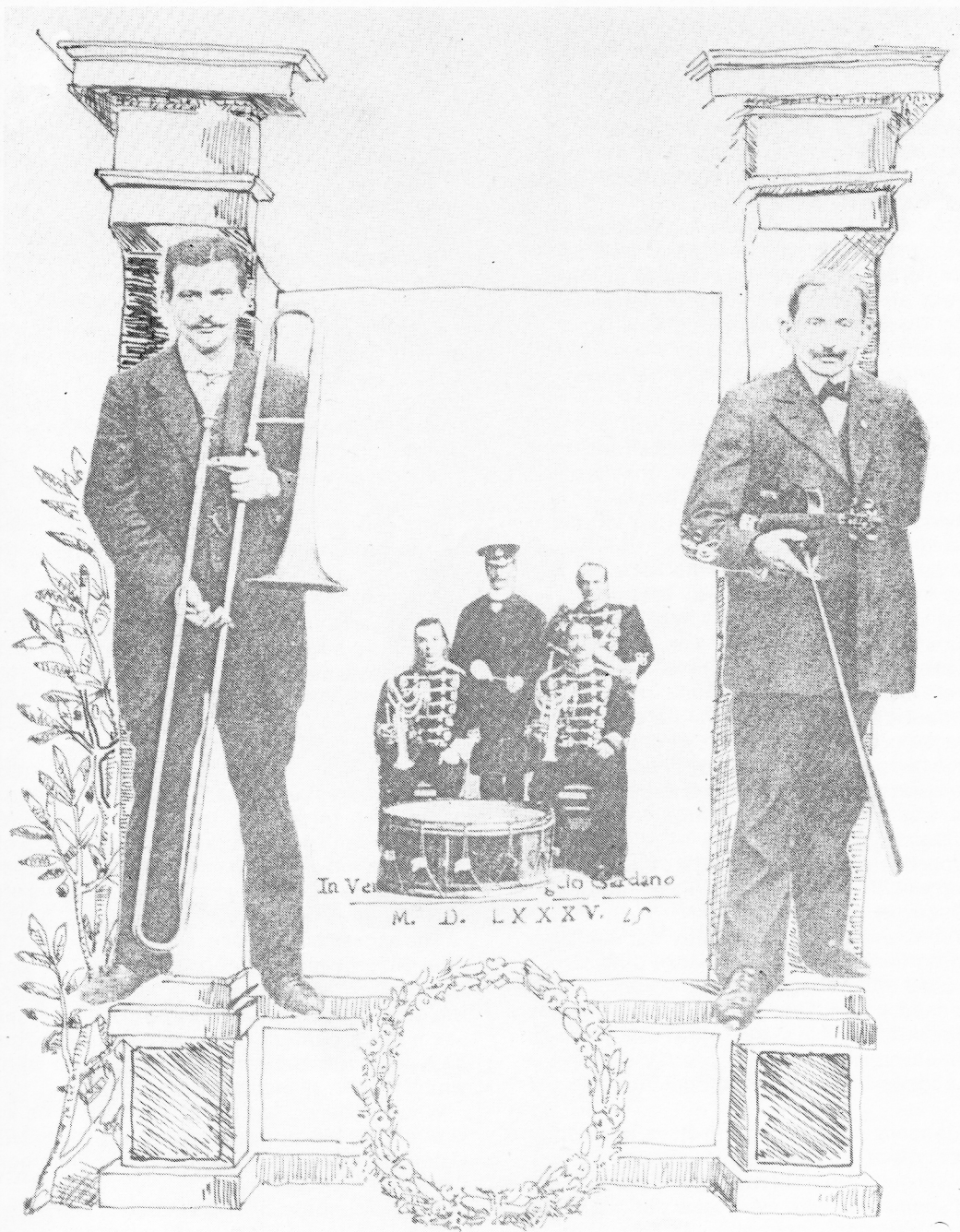
1 Now wait on,  
2 Just because I said I can tune the piano,  
3 It doesn't mean I agree with you that it needs tuning.

**STORYTELLER** Got me! My flatmate then said "phaaar!" and walked out. Later my flatmate came in again after I had been playing the piano again and said, "it needs tuning". And I said:

1 No it doesn't.

**END**





K. A. T. C. B. I. C. K.



## OPENING TO A DISCUSSION

I am not interested in discussing the work of any particular companies or individuals; it is far more important and appropriate to first establish some grounds for critical discussion.

The situation of writing this article for a dance issue of a music magazine, I find particularly ironical. It seems that any critical discussion of dance or indeed the performing arts must exist in the context of a discussion venue of another discipline. This is not to say that there are no journals that deal with a critical discussion of the performing arts, simply that there isn't one in Australia.

Does this then mean that performing arts, or more specifically dance, is discussed in terms of an aesthetic or critical form or another discipline? This may provide interesting paradoxes if exploited consciously.

Still the obvious remains: there is no formal journal in Australia that provides a critical forum for dance in Australia. Some reasons for this are perhaps the fact that dancers are seen, treated, and therefore see themselves, as idiots, and not in any way related to any academic or analytical tradition. The problem of numbers is relevant, but is only a masking issue: it serves to create an excuse but isn't a real reason.

It is too romantic a vision to believe that here, stuck away in the backwoods of the universe, we are somehow being restricted and denied knowledge or some type of right by the very fact of this location. It is about time that this position was seen for its positive, though not nationalistic, points.

Whether you like it or not, there is an attitude to dance in Australia; if this is the same as an attitude to 'Australian Dance' is uncertain.

The regionally versus internationality debate has a similar effect on those involved to that of other areas such as the visual arts. What differs is the comparative size of the dance population to, say, the visual arts population, the difference in status—the money equals value game—between these two areas, and the attitudes of various sections of the whole population toward dance.

The way dancers consider themselves is directly related to the myth of 'No History of Australian Dance'. This is obviously quite different from the situation in the visual arts. It seems that with every new generation of dancers, what has gone on before is forgotten or discounted as being monumentally insignificant. After all we all know that what is really important, by definition, must happen Over There. So each wave sort of cancels itself out. This situation is quite erroneous, but is further complicated by a few prominent individuals in the dance scene setting themselves up as gurus with the latest information from Over There, to be disclosed only to the valued few; or an even more perverse situation of transporting 'styles' verbatim to the Antipodes and then after a few years pronouncing them proudly 'Australian'.

So then, we are confronted with this notion of Australian dance. In a way I think this is a complete non-issue in terms of trying to define it. What is the issue, is the attitudes towards it. This is inextricably related to the notion of context. To put it at its crudest, the ratio of dancers to general population will probably be around the same here as Over There. The point is

that a larger population of dancers tends to generate more activity, and be both more confident and more supportive. This difference does not mean that the quality of the work produced is necessarily better, there is more of everything.

The myth that everything is better anywhere else is nonetheless relentlessly and enthusiastically resuscitated by people who should know better.

Distortions in the view we have of ourselves are heightened by the prevailing attitude to visiting artists. They are seen totally out of their environment, in a state where they are likely to be seen as having almost star status, a status that they may not necessarily enjoy in their natural habitat. The quality of their work does not alter, just as their position in relation to their audience alters; the context and in some way the meaning shifts.

The concept of internationality versus regionality is not an argument to be decided on, but a matrix that should remain in flux.

A perception of dance in Australia—after all that's all it is—is it really there?—is inextricably and dynamically related to what happens overseas. But there is another layer on top of this; what happens here must be seen on its own terms; its value cannot lie only in its relation to what happens somewhere else. Without having to justify, it must truly exist.

For the 'general audience' the lack of information, writing and discussion about dance precipitates a lack of interest. In relation to the visual arts, which has enormous and accessible coverage, the lack of obvious accumulating value seems to deter people from appreciating dance. After all, what is the real value of dance; a question on a number of people's lips.

The accessibility of dance is also a problem that often interests a similar group of people. To engage the comparison with the visual arts yet again, because of the difference in the status of these two areas, people seem more content to either suspend judgement on particular works of art or to simply go with the tide which is both strong and opulent.

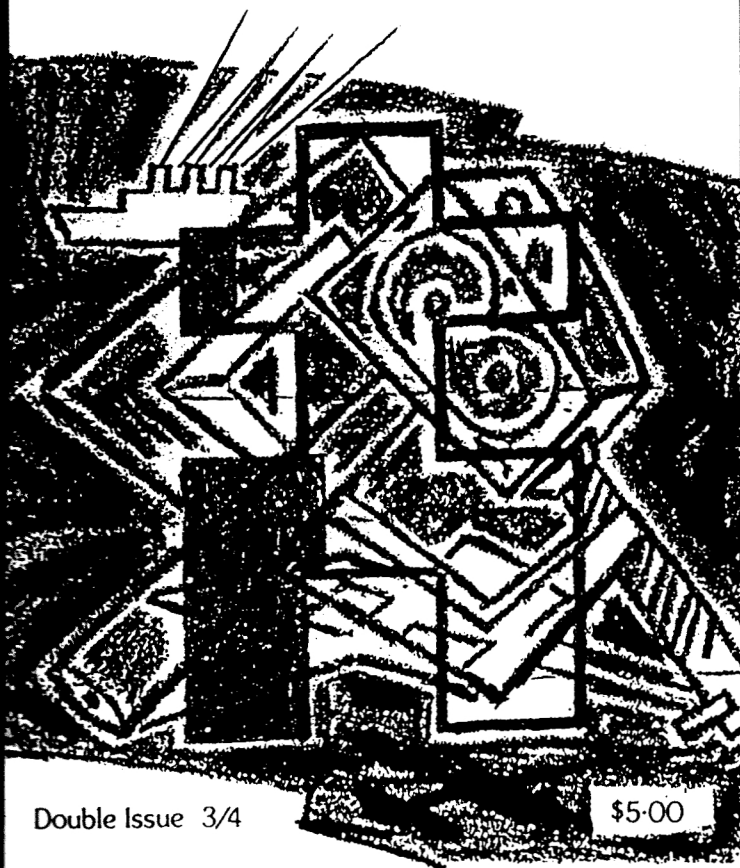
Whether dance has a responsibility to be accessible is doubtful. It is not understood any more or less than visual art, it is simply that the desire (the money) isn't there.

The way people involved in dance see themselves in their own situation is directly related to the way other art workers see them, the way their audience sees them, and the way the 'general public' sees them; basically dancers are seen as morons and there are grave doubts in the minds of many whether they are artists at all. One is immediately tempted to place the discussion on dance here (as perhaps offering a vantage point): a direct line into the way dancers or people involved in dance see themselves and—dare I say it—their art; or their profession, or perhaps their life!

This is merely an opening to a discussion; to throw up ideas and to look at them. To begin to think and discuss critically the position of 'contemporary' dance in Australia now.

**Shelley Lasica**

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The Australia Music Centre is a national music information service which is currently located in The Rocks, Sydney. At the Centre you will find a resource containing published and unpublished scores, in addition to books, tapes, records and periodicals on Australian music. The Centre also maintains national daily press clippings on music, and biography files on Australian composers and their works. Scores and books can be borrowed through inter-library loan, and other material can be photocopied (within reason). At present there are no provisions for loaning out tapes and records to individuals.

The Centre is presently entering music information onto its new data base. In the process, catalogues of Australian music are being updated, as are the information files on Australian composers. The Centre is also seeking to increase its holdings of Australian scores and tapes. Composers and other potential donors are encouraged to contact us about this, and about our copying of parts funding scheme.

Since the recent appointment of Frank Maietta as administrator of the AMC, there has begun a process of rationalizing and reassessing the Centre's goals and activities. One possible outcome of this process is that the Centre may shift to a more modest location in Sydney. If we sacrifice the harbour views we can redirect funds towards more efficiently achieving the Centre's current aims; namely, "to foster Australian composition by working with and on behalf of Australian composers to advance the performance, broadcasting, publication and recording of their works".

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**Rosalind Weisser  
Music Information Officer**

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